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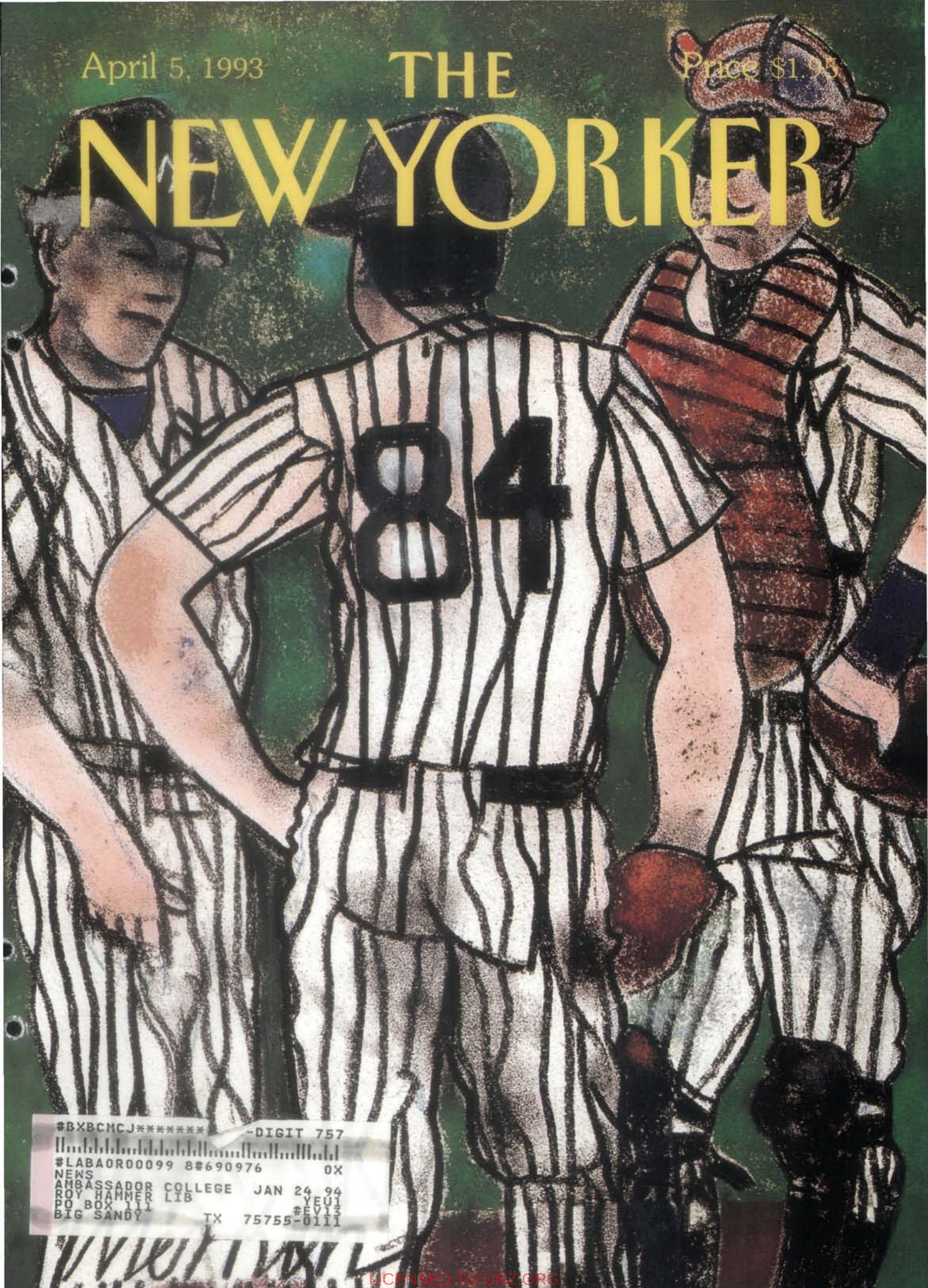

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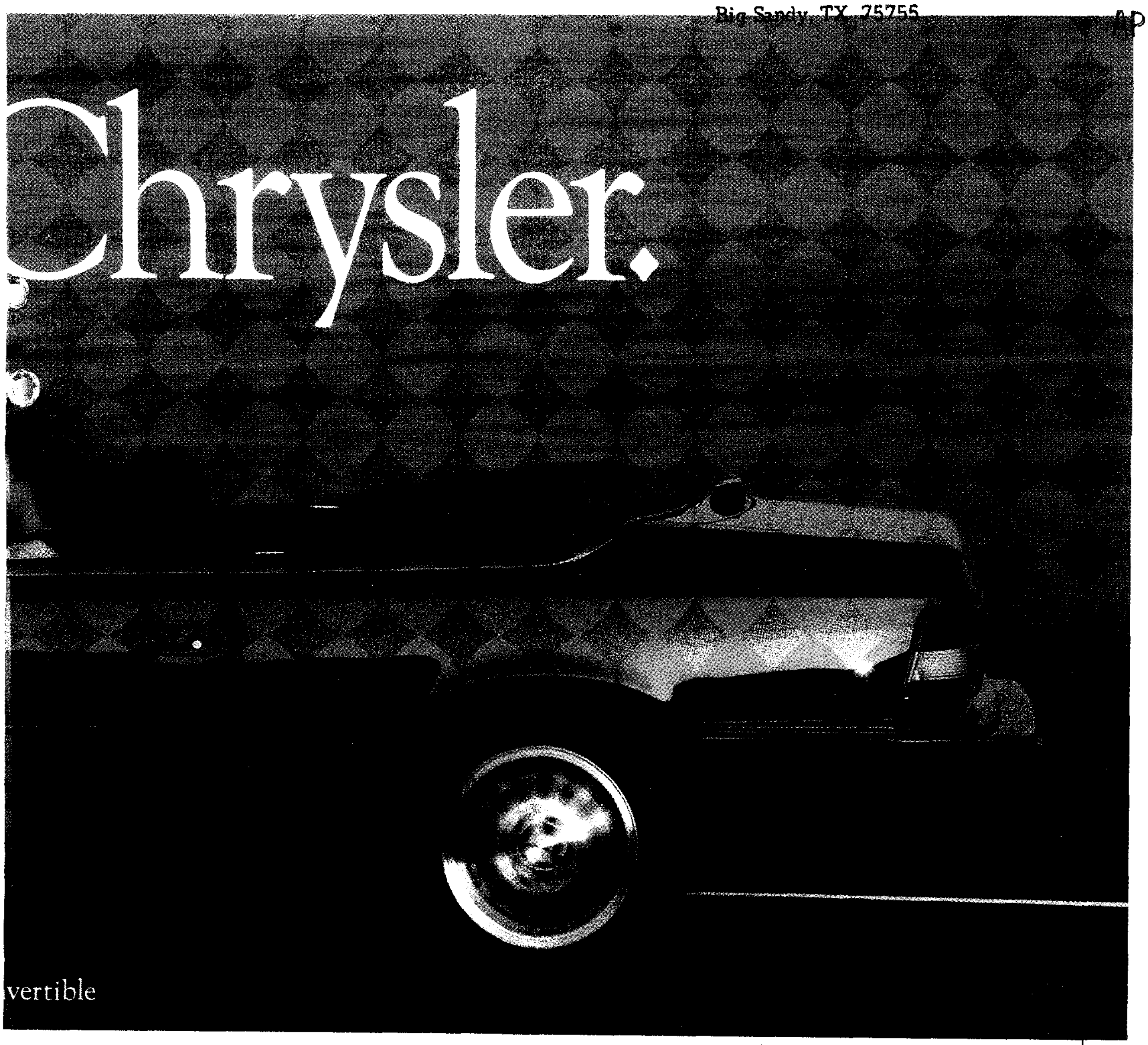

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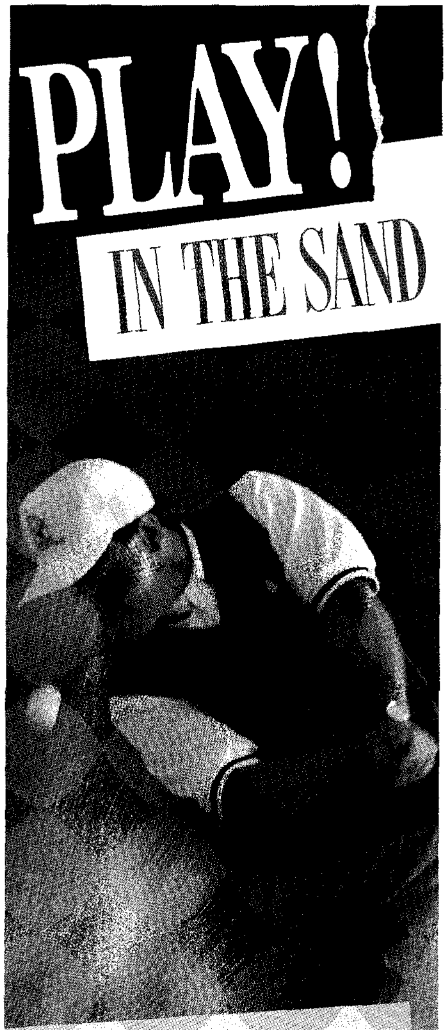

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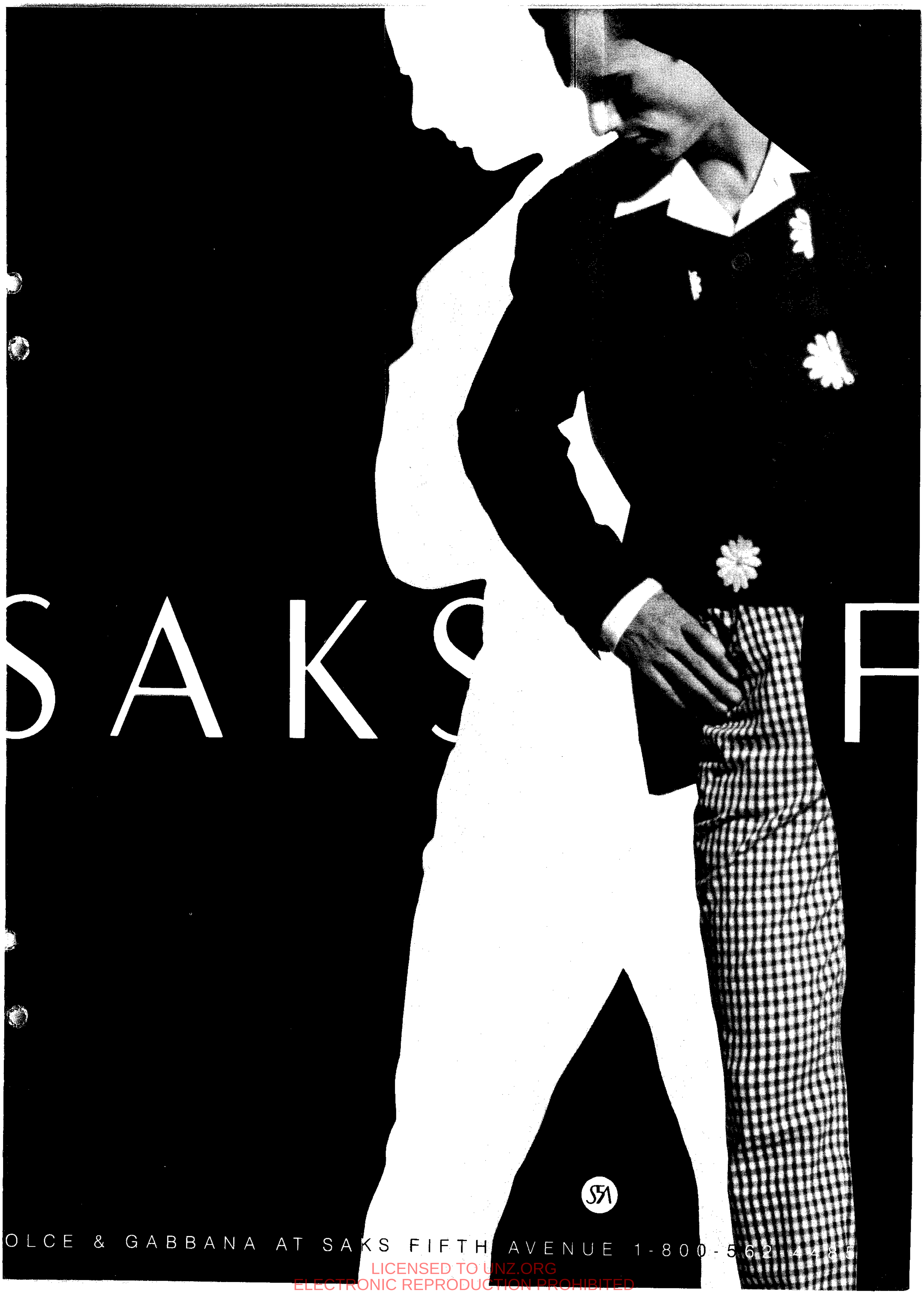
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COMMENT

GETTING OVER

"THE bloody massacre in Bangladesh quickly covered over the memory of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia," Milan Kundera lamented in his 1980 novel "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting," no doubt singling out the particular memory closest to his heart. He went on, "The assassination of Allende drowned out the groans of Bangladesh, the war in the Sinai Desert made people forget Allende, the Cambodian massacre made people forget Sinai, and so on and so forth until ultimately everyone lets everything be forgotten."

Of course, there are places in the world where the pattern that Kundera described remains dismayingly evident—and the United States in some of its aspects is certainly among them. (Who any longer truly remembers the past decade's American interventions in Nicaragua and Lebanon and Grenada and Panama, or is willing to acknowledge the moral obligations to the people of those countries which we may have incurred as a result?) When Europeans talk about other nations' becoming more and more like the United States, this absorption in the present, oblivious of both past and future, is one of the things they often have in mind.

But there are places in the world where the past—or, anyway, a reified version of the past—holds such continuous sway as almost to choke off the possibility of liveliness and creativity and forward-thinking in the present. The most pressing such instance currently is the tragedy of ex-Yugoslavia, where people not only seem incapable of forgetting the past but hardly seem capable of thinking about anything else. Serbians and Croatians and Muslims are so mired in grievances dating back to the middle of the Second World War, or in enmities dating back to the days immediately before the First World War, or even in martyrologies wending back well beyond the fourteenth century—such grievances remain so alive today—that it's almost as if the living had been transformed into pale, wraithlike shades haunting those ghosts rather than the other way around.

And Yugoslavia is not the only place where the living seem incapable of get-

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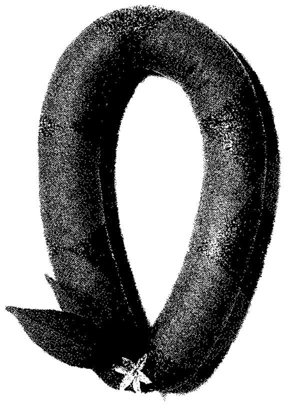
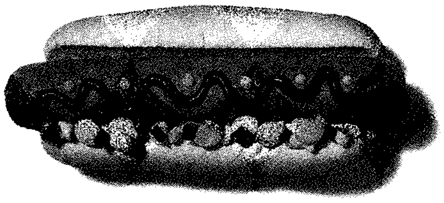
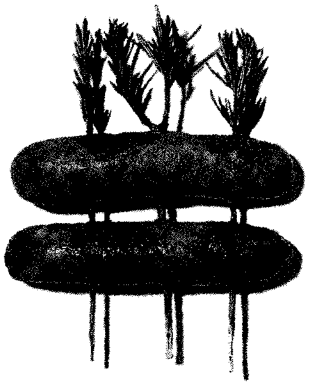


Kielbasa
Smoked, with garlic and peppers, usually served with sauerkraut. Probably shouldn't be eaten before a romantic interlude.



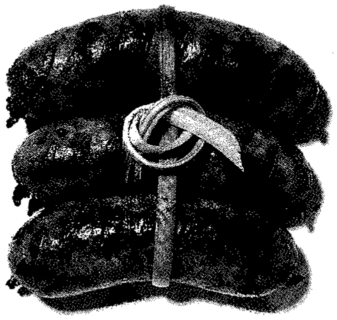
Hot Dog
Invented by Anton Feuchtwanger, who called it a *frankfurter*. Lucky us. If he was less modest, we'd be eating Feuchtwangers and Beans.



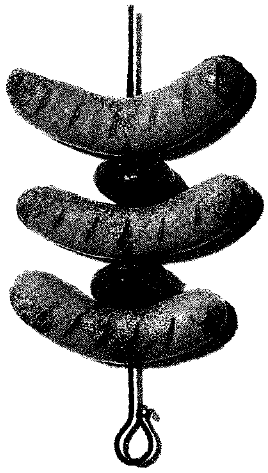
Italian Pork Sausage
Big at Roman orgies, they were banned as symbols of debauchery. Bootlegging of these "Bad Boys of Meat" became rampant.

How To Handle The Little Brats.

Bockwurst
Some experts feel grilling burns the outside and leaves the inside raw, so they suggest baking. Would this, then, be bakedwurst?



Thai Chicken Sausage
A true hot (as in HOT!) dog. Chile peppers, originally used as a preservative, make these dogs bite back.



Bangers
Popular at breakfast, but not exclusively; the mighty Spartans showed their manly prowess in biting contests of hanging links.

If you're careful not to smother a bratwurst with condiments, you'll find tasty subtleties best drawn out by Sutter Home White Zinfandel. With its hint of fresh berries and crisp finish, it offers a refreshingly clean taste that complements even the biggest brats.

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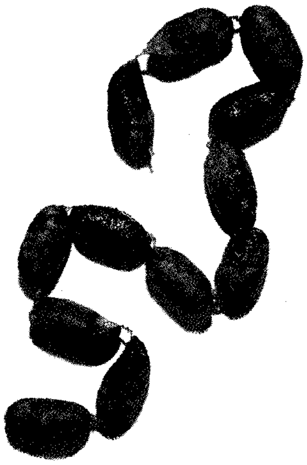

Linguisa
Portuguese, with red peppers and garlic. Good diced in eggs, cut in chunks, or skewered over burning coals. It's not easy being a sausage...

SUTTER HOME. IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT, DO IT RIGHT.

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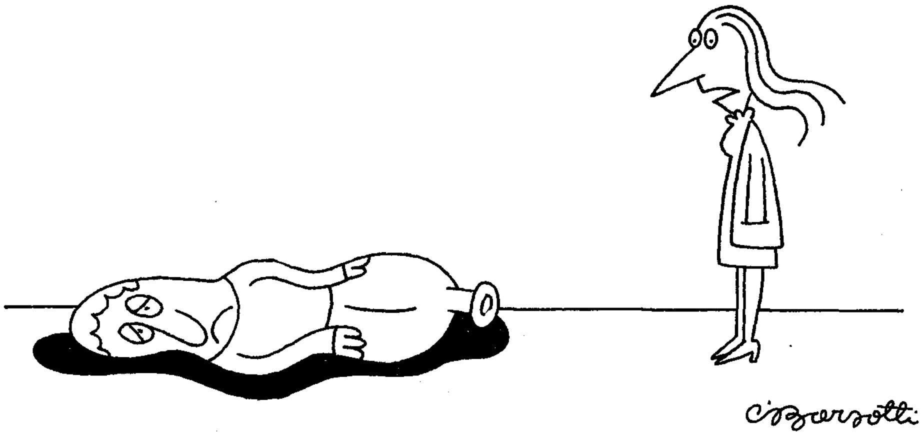


"Well, I have to tell your publisher _something_*."*

ting over, let alone forgetting, their pasts. There are also vast expanses of the crumbling Soviet empire, there is South Africa, there is Northern Ireland, and Central America and Sri Lanka and India and Palestine, and even Crown Heights. True, in many of these cases the past grievances have been artificially revived and exacerbated by demagogues intent on their own short-term tactical advantages, but the point is that populations in all these places are susceptible to such demagogic appeals precisely because the past, far from having been forgotten, remains a terrible, festering wound.

A certain kind of forgetting—or, rather, a getting over, a superseding—is exactly what is needed in many of these places. "Nations are a plebiscite every day," the French philosopher Ernest Renan wrote at the end of the last century, "and they are built on great rememberings and great forgettings." And yet what's called for is not the obliviousness of simple denial. The Polish master Zbigniew Herbert warned in a poem recalling the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, "Ignorance about those who have disappeared undermines the reality of the world." (Surely this unreality, this vertiginous substancelessness of experience, is the sort of thing Kundera was bewailing in those lines from his novel.) Shoring up the reality of the world, however, is by no means easy. Shortly after the liberation of France, the philosopher Merleau-Ponty observed:

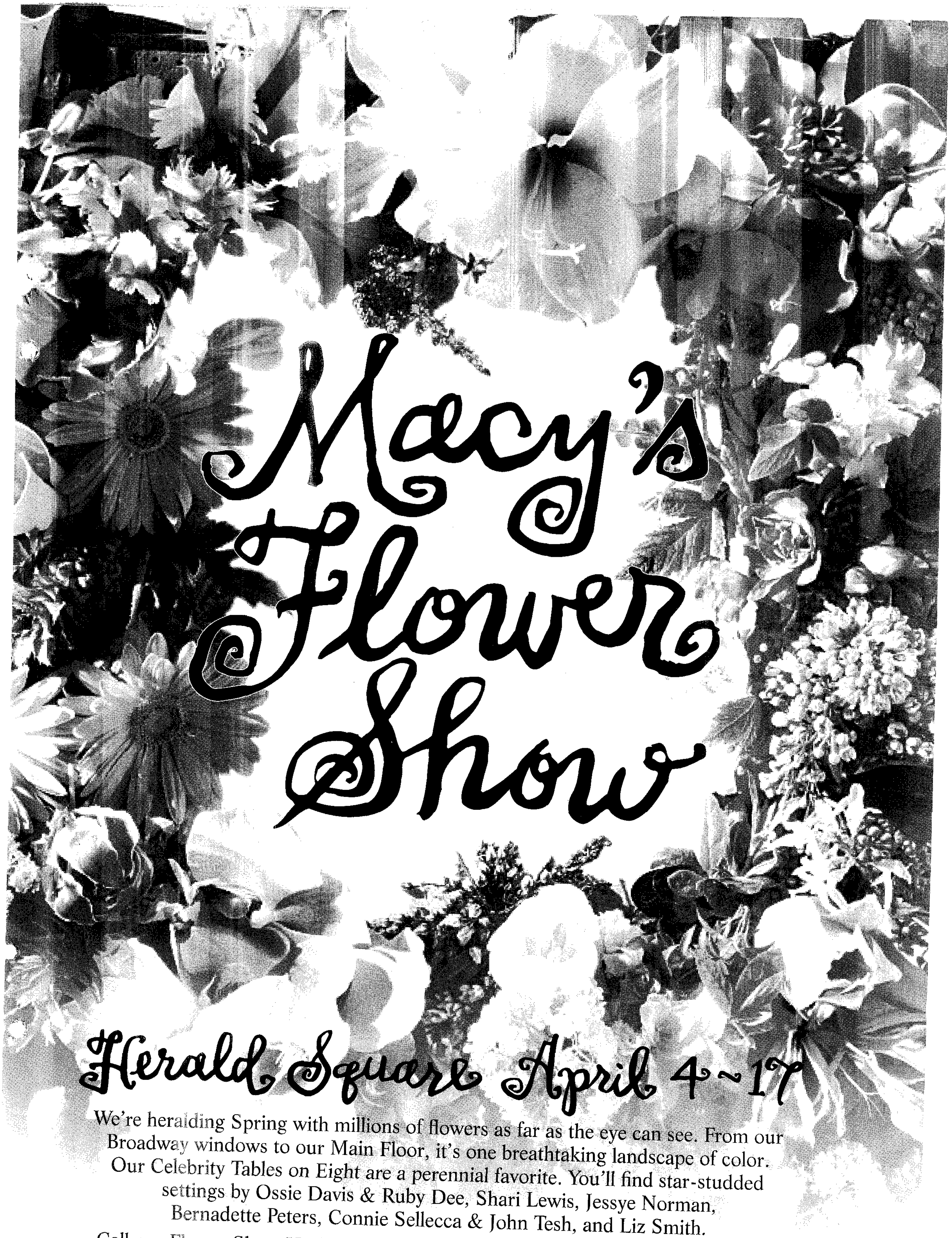
> We have learned history, and we claim that it must not be forgotten. But are we not here the dupes of our emotions? If, ten years hence, we reread these pages and so many others, what will we think of them? We do not want this year of 1945 to become just another year among many. A man who has lost a son or a woman he loved does not want to live beyond that loss. He leaves the house in the state it was in. The familiar objects upon the table, the clothes in the closet mark an empty place in the world. . . . The day will come, however, when the meaning of these books and these clothes will change: once . . . the clothes were wearable, and now they are out of style and shabby. To keep them any longer would not be to make the dead person live on; quite the opposite, they date his death all the more cruelly.

The challenge, then, is not so much to forget as to remember in a *living* way, a way that makes room—that *allows* room—for the living, in all their newness.

Hannah Arendt was on to something crucial in her 1958 book "The Human Condition" when—a Jew writing barely a decade after the Holocaust—she insisted on the primacy of forgiveness: "Without being forgiven, released from the consequence of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever." For Arendt, forgiveness was essential to human freedom: "Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new." This capacity for initiation, for beginning something new, is the core wonder at the heart of Arendt's depiction of the human condition. It is the great hope.

And yet the forgiveness she sees as the ground for that hope is not a simple forgetting. If anything, it is a highly charged and continuously recharged form of remembering. Nor can it be accomplished in isolation. "No one can forgive himself, [just as] no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself," Arendt notes in a passage with particular relevance to the departing or mutating dictatorial regimes, in Latin America and elsewhere, that, as a routine final gesture before surrendering power, lavish blanket amnesties upon themselves. As Arendt declares, "Forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self." True forgiveness is achieved in community: it is something people do for each other and with each other—and, at a certain point, for free. It is history working itself out as grace, and it can be accomplished only in truth. That truth, however, is not merely knowledge: it is acknowledgment, it is a coming-to-terms-with, and it is a labor. Ironically, in places where former antagonists refuse to acknowledge the horror of their past depredations, full-scale trials—the painstaking laying out and proving of guilt, under exacting conditions of due process—may be both necessary and salutary before any forgiveness can be extended. And such forgiveness makes sense only in the context of starting anew—something that cannot be done if the prior malefactors retain their positions of authority, immune and unaccountable.

Such forgiveness is never done once and for all: the past is kept alive, is continually revisited, but in the mode of supersession, of moving on. In Sarajevo and Belgrade, in Hebron and Belfast and Nagorno-Karabakh and San Salvador and Soweto and Los Angeles, there is tremendous work waiting to be done—not only the work of finding some concrete way of securing the democratic rights of minorities within their larger polities, but also the equally daunting work of finding ways of advancing the spiritual and material well-being of the entire population. The point is to get on with that work as, precisely, a way of honoring the past. ♦



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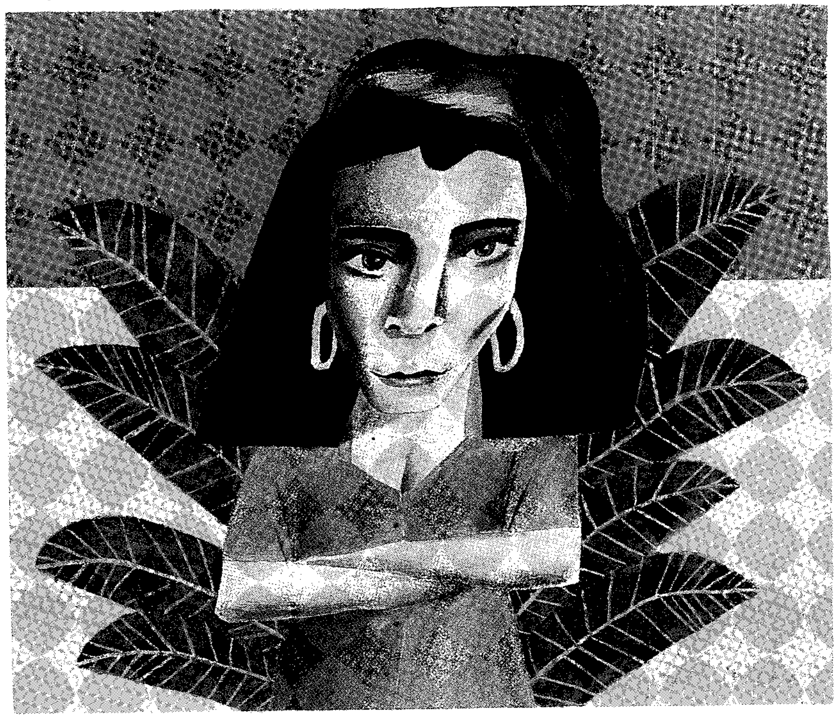
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

Marga Libre

MARGA GOMEZ, a Bay Area performer clearly headed for the big time, says she takes more after her father, a Cuban-born comic who in the fifties and sixties shared bills with Celia Cruz, than after her mother, an exotic dancer who late in life fled her New York family for Paris and freedom. "I can't salsa for shit, but I could always tell jokes," Gomez explains, a statement borne out by her decade of success in standup and by many of the anecdotes in "Memory Tricks," a full-length piece that she has been honing for two years and is now bringing to the Public for a run in rep with David Cale's "Deep in a Dream of You." But the point of the anecdotes in "Memory Tricks" is less to create "Mambo Mouth: The Women" than to explore the performer's desire to forgive her mother, a self-absorbed person who, before she and Gomez could have that hoped-for heart-to-heart, developed Alzheimer's. Hardly the stuff of standup.

Gomez is not forgetting her club roots, however. At the Whitney Museum's midtown branch (March 31 at 7:30), she will be performing "Marga Gomez Is Pretty, Witty & Gay," a monologue that she describes as a "comic nervous breakdown." The work finds her preparing for a talk-show appearance as an Adult Female Homosexual, and, among other things, lampoons the media's obsession with gay topics. "I dream of a day," she says, with true California utopianism, "when your sexuality doesn't have to be your career."



Marga Gomez at the Whitney Museum and the Public Theatre.

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for schedule and ticket information.)

AIN'T BROADWAY GRAND—Mike Burstyn portrays Mike Todd in this musical comedy. The score is by Mitch Leigh, the book is by Thomas Meehan and Lee Adams, and the lyrics are by Mr. Adams. Directed by Scott Harris. In previews. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

ANOTHER TIME—A 1989 play, by Ronald Harwood, about a Jewish family in South Africa. Malcolm McDowell, Marian Seldes, Joan Copeland, Michael Lombard, and James Waterston make up the cast. Opens March 31 at 8. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)

DEEP IN A DREAM OF YOU—A collection of twelve monologues by David Cale, which will eventually run in repertory with Marga Gomez's "Memory Tricks." Previews April 1-3. Opens April 4 at 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 598-7150.)

JENNY KEEPS TALKING—A new play by Richard Greenberg, with Leslie Ayvazian. This show runs in repertory with "Pretty Fire." In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

JEWISH REPERTORY THEATRE—The third show of the season is **THE KING OF CARPETS**, a comedy by Joel Hammer. Previews begin April 3. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

LAUREEN'S WHEREABOUTS—A play by Larry Ketron. The cast comprises Mark Blum, Mia Dillon, Carolyn McCormick, Kevin O'Rourke, and Scott Sowers. In previews. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

MARGA GOMEZ—Presenting **MARGA GOMEZ IS PRETTY, WITTY & GAY.** (Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, Park Ave. at 42nd St. March 31 at 7:30. No tickets necessary. Seating on a first-come, first-served basis.). . . ¶ In **MEMORY TRICKS**, which starts previews April 8. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 598-7150.)

NEW YORK THEATRE WORKSHOP—Presenting two plays by Caryl Churchill, in rotating repertory: **OWNERS**, from 1972, and **TRAPS**, from 1977. "Owners" is in previews. "Traps" opens April 5 at 8; there are previews during the week before the opening. (79 E. 4th St. 302-6989.)

ONE SHOE OFF—Jeffrey DeMunn, Daniel Gerroll, Mary Beth Hurt, Brian Kerwin, and Jennifer Tilly in the cast of a new play by Tina Howe. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 598-7150.)

PRETTY FIRE—A one-woman play written by and starring, Charlayne Woodard. It runs in repertory with "Jenny Keeps Talking." In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

PUTTING IT TOGETHER—This celebration of Steph[illegible] Sondheim's music was first seen last year [illegible] Oxford, England. With Julie Andrews, Stephen Collins, Christopher Durang, Michael Rupert, and Rachel York. Preview on March 31. Opens April 1 at 6:45. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THREE HOTELS—A new play by Jon Robin Baitz, with Christine Lahti and Ron Rifkin. Previews through April 4. Opens April 6 at 8. (Circle Repertory Company, 99 Seventh Ave. S. 924-7100.)

THREE MEN ON A HORSE—Jack Klugman and Tony Randall star in the National Actors Theatre's revival of a comedy by John Cecil Holm and George Abbott. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6280.)

THE WHO'S "TOMMY"—The Pinball Wizard comes to Broadway. Pete Townshend and director Des McAnuff have adapted the classic rock opera for the stage. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

WIDOWERS' HOUSES—The Pearl Theatre Company presents Shaw's first play. Previews through April 3. Opens April 4 at 2. (Pearl, 125 W. 22nd St. 645-7708.)

YORK THEATRE COMPANY—Presenting a revival of the 1961 musical **CARNIVAL.** Opens March 31 at 8, and runs through May 2. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 534-5366.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AVEN' U BOYS—A play by Frank Pugliese, with Ron Eldard, Michael Imperioli, Lucinda Jenney, Cynthia Martells, Adrian Pasdar, and Lili Taylor. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 564-8038.)

BACK TO BACHARACH AND DAVID—A new musical revue, directed by Kathy Najimy. The singers are Melinda Gilb, Steve Gunderson, Sue Mosher, and Lillias White. (Club 53, at the New York Hilton, Sixth Ave. at 53rd St. 261-5853.)

THE BEST OF FRIENDS—A play by Hugh Whitemore, with Roy Dotrice, Michael Allinson, and Diana Douglas. The work is based on the correspondence of George Bernard Shaw and two of his friends, Sir Sydney Cockerell and Dame Laurentia McLachlan, the Abbess of Stanbrook. This drama was first done in 1988, in London. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

BLUE HILL TROUPE—Benefit performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's **IOLANTHE.** (John Jay Co[illegible]lege Theatre, 899 Tenth Ave., at 58th [illegible] Closes April 3. For information about tickets, call 879-6582.)

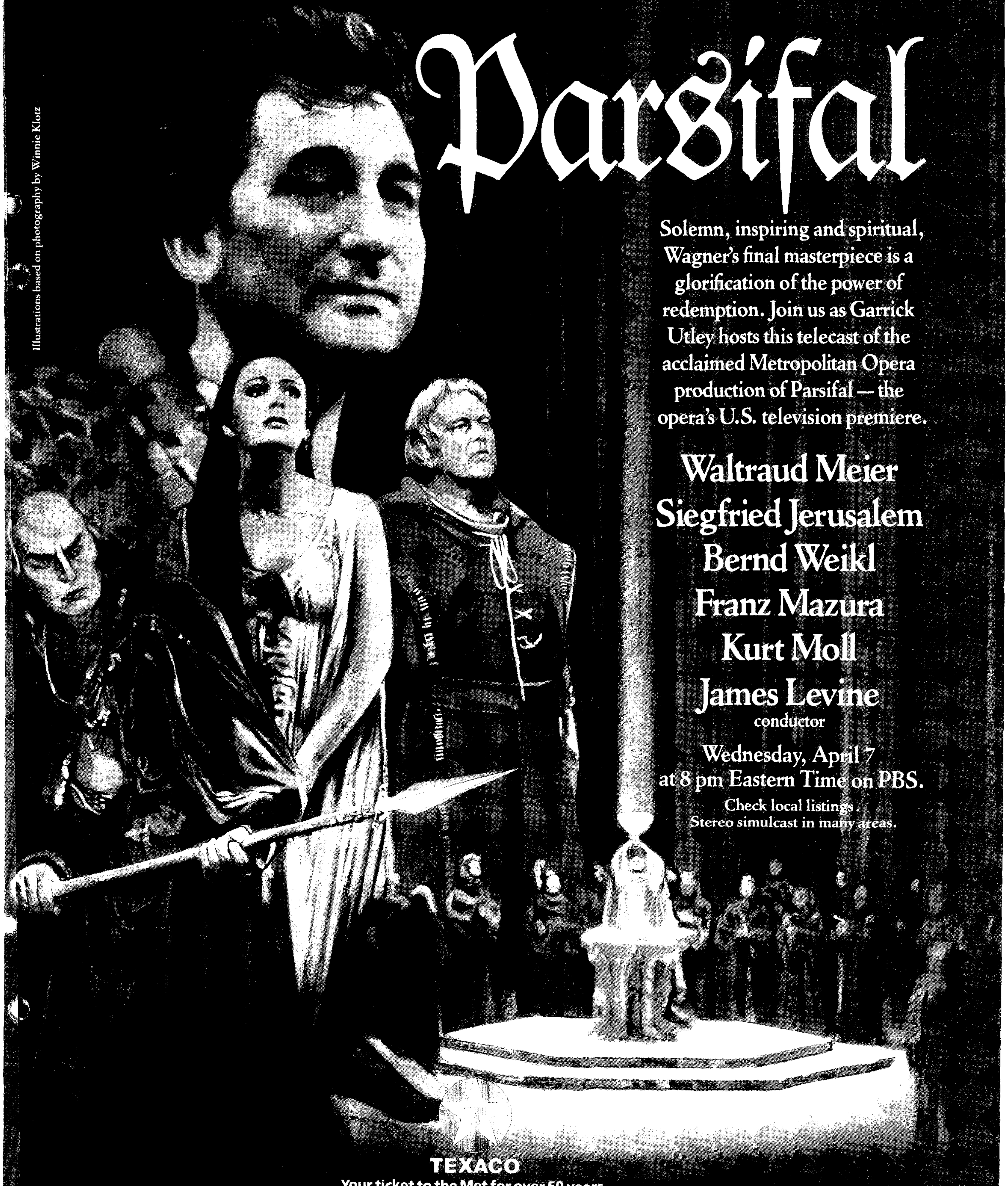
CANDIDA—Shaw's play, with Mary Steenburgen, Robert Foxworth, and Robert Sean Leonard. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

THE CONFESSIONS OF STEPIN FETCHIT—A play written by Matt Robinson and based on the life of the actor Lincoln Perry. With Roscoe Orman in the title role. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074.)

A COUPLE OF BLAGUARDS—The actors Frank and Malachy McCourt reminisce about their Irish childhood. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 757-3318.)

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA PRESENTS

Parsifal



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Solemn, inspiring and spiritual, Wagner's final masterpiece is a glorification of the power of redemption. Join us as Garrick Utley hosts this telecast of the acclaimed Metropolitan Opera production of Parsifal — the opera's U.S. television premiere.

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Siegfried Jerusalem
Bernd Weikl
Franz Mazura
Kurt Moll
James Levine
conductor

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THE THEATRE–Cont'd

Fool Moon—Bill Irwin and David Shiner are the inspired clowns in a show that is perfection itself. The only sound you'll hear is the merry music of the Red Clay Ramblers and the abundant laughter of the audience. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/8/93.) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 221-1211.)

Forbidden Broadway 1993—Once again, a galaxy of parodies that sharpen into satire. This edition is as funny as most of its predecessors. Among the new shows under consideration are "Guys and Dolls" and "Falsettos," and the holdovers include "Les Misérables" and "The Phantom of the Opera." Gerard Alessandrini, as if you had to be told, is the inspired writer and director, and Susanne Blakeslee, Dorothy Kiara, Brad Oscar, and Craig Wells are the splendid performers, doing a large assortment of roles. (1/25/93) (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-9090.)

The Goodbye Girl—Bernadette Peters and Martin Short, two brilliant, funny stars, transform this otherwise indifferent musical adaptation of Neil Simon's movie into a sporadically festive evening. The dances by Graciela Daniele are more than helpful, as is the comic support by John Christopher Jones. Michael Kidd directed. (3/15/93) (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh—A musical based on the song parodies of Allan Sherman and offering further proof that Camp Lite is taking over Off Broadway. The show was conceived and written by Douglas Bernstein and Rob Krausz. (Circle in the Square Downtown, 159 Bleecker St. 254-6330.)

Jean Cocteau Repertory—Presenting THE CENCI, an 1819 verse drama by Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Shakespeare's MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

Jeffrey—A comedy, by Paul Rudnick, about love in the age of AIDS; with John Michael Higgins. It is less a fleshed-out play than a series of Scenes from Gay Life, but Mr. Rudnick can quip with the best of them. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

Love's Labour's Lost—Shakespeare's comedy, directed by Michael Langham. A Theatre for a New Audience production. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200. Closes April 3.)

Naked Angels—Presenting TAKE TWO, a program of short plays by Jon Robin Baitz, Craig Lucas, and Jacquelyn Reingold, among others. (114 W. 17th St. 727-0012. Closes April 10.)

The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me—A series of vignettes, by David Drake, about contemporary gay life. Starring Eric Paeper. (Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 564-8038.)

Oleanna—David Mamet, in fine, curmudgeonly form, takes on political correctness, sexual harassment, and a number of other topics in this brief, powerful drama that continues to stir up the ideologues. The play's skepticism is as evenhanded as it is corrosive. Treat Williams and Mary McCann make up the cast. (11/16/92) (Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 307-4100.)

Redwood Curtain—Jeff Daniels stars in a play by Lanford Wilson. Marshall W. Mason was the director. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

Repertorio Español—Presenting Spanish-language productions of García Lorca's BODAS DE SANGRE ("Blood Wedding"), García Márquez's LA CÁNDIDA ERÉNDIRA ("Innocent Eréndira"), and other works. Simultaneous English translation is available for some performances of "Innocent Eréndira." (Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 E. 27th St. 889-2850.)

The Root—A play by Gary Richards, with Giancarlo Esposito. Matthew Penn was the director. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 645-1242. Closes April 3.)

The Second Annual Heart O' Texas Eczema Telethon—A comedy by Mark Dunn. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 691-6226.)

The Sisters Rosensweig—Wendy Wasserstein's new play, a comedy with serious undertones, is about the reunion in London of three American Jewish sisters—an international banker, a travel writer, and a wife and mother who's a professional dispenser of advice. They are portrayed by Jane Alexander, Christine Estabrook, and Madeline Kahn. The spirit of Chekhov hovers but never intrudes. Laughter is continuous. (11/2/92) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me—Alec McCowen (English), Stephen Rea (Irish), and James McDaniel (American) give stunning performances as hostages in Beirut in Frank McGuinness's moving and humorous play. Robin Lefèvre directed. (12/7/92) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Song of Jacob Zulu—Tug Yourgrau's play is set in South Africa and concerns a young man accused of bombing a mall. Zakes Mokae, K. Todd Freeman, and the musical group Ladysmith Black Mambazo (led by Joseph Shabalala) are featured. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Toothbrush—A comedy by Jorge Díaz. Performances in English alternate with ones in Spanish. (Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 354-1293.)

Wilder, Wilder, Wilder—Three one-acters by the invaluable Thornton—"The Long Christmas Dinner," "Pullman Car Hiawatha," and, best of all, "The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden." The actors, though most of them are comparatively inexperienced, do a very good job, so the real star of the occasion is Edward Berkeley, the director. (12/21/92) (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 662-8562. Closes here April 4; moves to Circle in the Square starting April 9.)

Wings—Jeffrey Lunden and Arthur Perlman's musical adaptation of a 1978 play by Arthur Kopit. The musical premièred last year in Chicago. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 598-7150.)

Winter Lies—A thriller, set in New York, by Robert Clyman. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 465-1761. Closes April 11.)

The Wiz—Stephanie Mills and André De Shields return to their original roles in this revival of the 1975 musical. (Beacon, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Closes April 11.)

Wrong Turn at Lungfish—The play owes more to day-in, day-out television than it does to the theatre, but it does at least serve as an occasion to present George C. Scott as a grouchy, dying old professor. Mr. Scott does not let us down, and Tony Danza, making his New York stage début, demonstrates that he deserves a better part under happier circumstances. (3/8/93) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

LONG RUNS

BEAU JEST: Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CRAZY FOR YOU:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **FALSETTOS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **FOREVER PLAID:** Steve McGraw's, 158 W. 72nd St. 595-7400. . . . **GUYS AND DOLLS:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **JELLY'S LAST JAM:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **NUNSENSE:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **THE WILL ROGERS FOLLIES:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 730-8200.

DANCE

In Old Japan

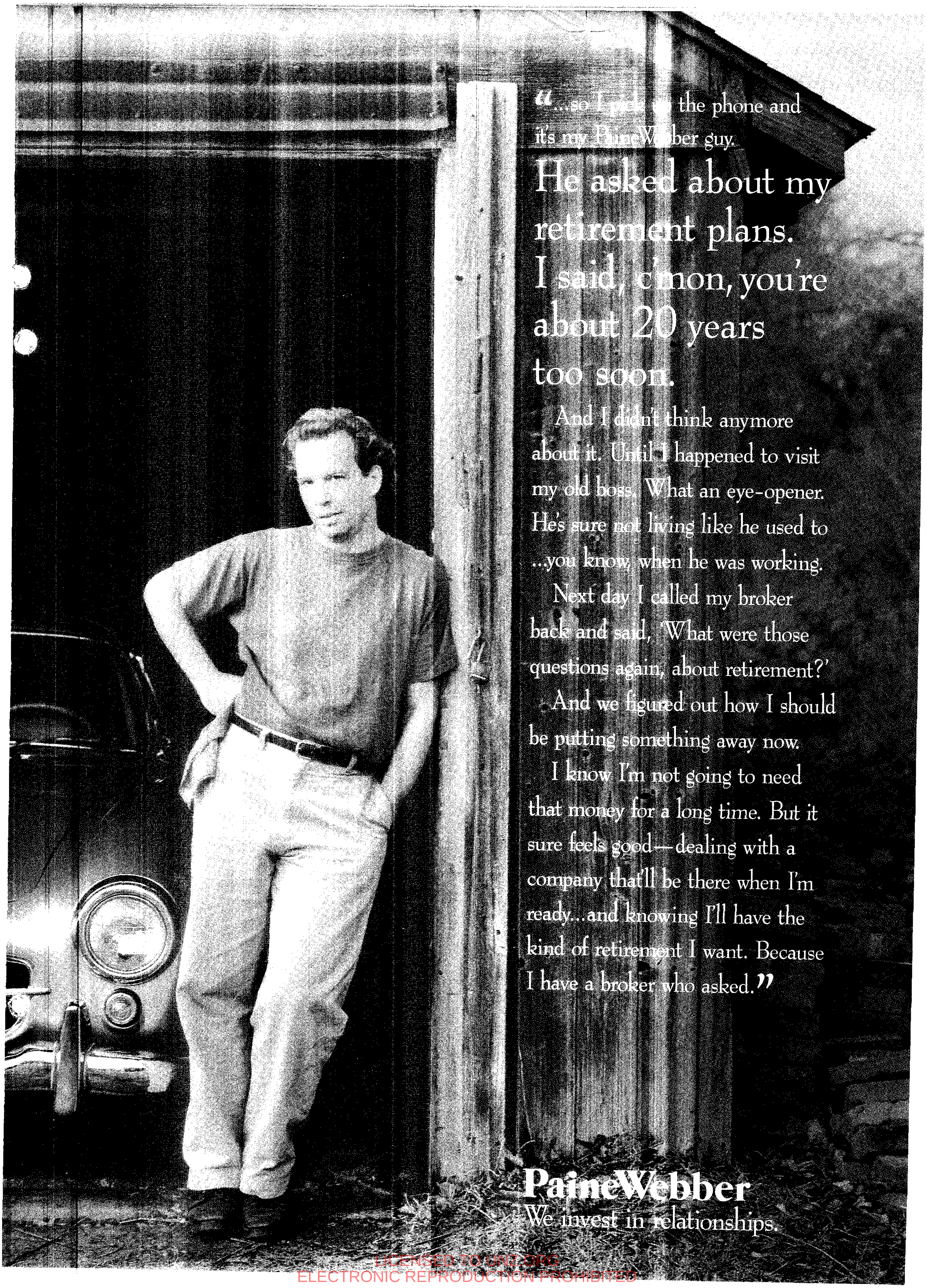
JIUTA-MAI, a Japanese solo dance form for women, was developed roughly two centuries ago at the Imperial Court, in Kyoto. The dances, accompanied by song, tend to be painstaking adagios characterized by various kinds of circular motion. They have one theme, love in feudal Japanese society—specifically, love between a courtesan and a lord. Their tone is mostly downcast. The quintessential Jiuta-mai situation is a woman who looks at the falling snow and thinks of a man who has died.

On April 1 at 8, the Japan Society (3[illegible] East 47th Street) will present a rare performance of Jiuta-mai. (For information about tickets, call 752-3015.) There will be two Jiuta-mai dancers on the program, Kanzaki Hidejo, who runs her own school in Tokyo, and her pupil Kanzaki Seijo. On the phone recently, Kanzaki Hidejo said, via translator, that the choreography for "Yuki" ("Snow")—one of the dances she will perform here—is about a hundred years old; it was made by her teacher's teacher. She emphasized the importance of subtlety in the movement—in the use of the eyes, for example. (When she moves her eyes from left to right, the audience is supposed to imagine something in front of her character.) Ms. Yoko Maeda, the translator, said that when Hidejo-san performs "Yuki" she chooses one of two kimonos—a young girl's or an older woman's—depending on the audience. She added that the dancer definitely intends to wear the young-girl kimono for New York.

Feld Ballets/NY—Final performances of the engagement. March 31 at 8: Program to be announced. . . . ¶ April 1 at 8: "Hadji," "Circa," and "Contra Pose." . . . ¶ April 2 at 8: "Kore," "Blooms Wake," and "Wolfgang Strategies." . . . ¶ April 3 at 8: "Ion," "Evoe," "Endsong," and "Common Ground." . . . ¶ April 4 at 2: "Contra Pose," "The Jig Is Up," and a ballet to be announced. . . . ¶ April 4 at 7:30: Students of the New Ballet School in "Hello Fancy" and "Half Time," and the company in "Blooms Wake" and "The Relative Disposition of the Parts." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

San Francisco Ballet—March 31 at 8: "Rubies," "Le Quattro Stagioni" (New York première), and "In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated." . . . ¶ April 1 at 8: "The Sons of Horus" (New York première), "Con Brio," (New York première), "Hamlet and Ophe[illegible] Pas de Deux" (New York première), a[illegible] "The End" (New York première). . . . ¶ April 2 at 8: "The Sons of Horus," "Bizet Pas de Deux," "Forevermore" (New York première), "Aunis" (New York première), and "Nanna's Lied" (New York première). . . . ¶ April 3 at 2 and 8, and April 4 at 3: "Swan Lake." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

Memorial Tribute—Gregory Hines, Savion Glover, the American Tap Dance Orchestra, and others will join in a salute to the late Charles (Honi) Coles. (Murray Bergtraum High School, 411 Pearl St., near City Hall. April 4 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 597-4613.)



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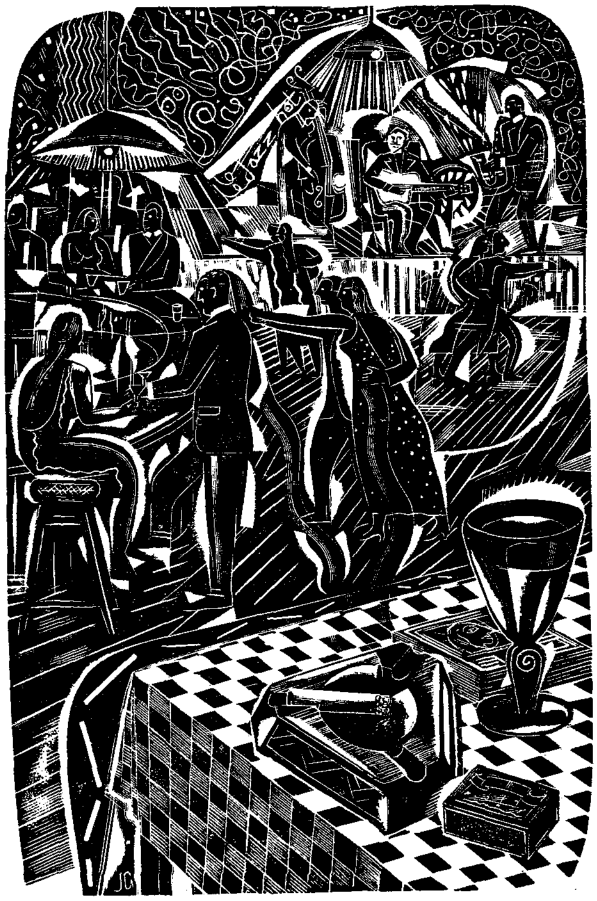

NIGHT LIFE

Downstairs Blues

LA CAVE ON FIRST is a pleasant surprise. Its location, 62nd and First Avenue, is rather improbable for a jazz spot, as is the fact that it's situated in the basement of a Mexican restaurant called Pancho Villa. But the place has an odd charm. It's an airy, red-walled restaurant and bar whose décor is a cross between a jazz club's (posters of Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong) and a French bistro's (gilt-framed mirrors and other antique-shop stuff). The food is billed as "French and soul cuisine."

The entertainment, as is often the case with less established clubs, includes a bit of everything, from tap dancing on Wednesdays to gospel on Sundays. The cover charge varies, and quality undoubtedly does, too. But Tuesday nights are a safe bet. They belong to Bob Gaddy, a wonderful blues singer and pianist. Gaddy has close-cropped white hair and a weathered mahogany face, and he wears glasses and slightly rumpled, sombre-looking suits. Sitting straight-backed at the piano, he has an impassive demeanor, but his music is quite the opposite. He plays stomping barrelhouse numbers and slow, soulful Delta blues. His rich voice bends and moans and howls and shouts. Gaddy does what all really good blues artists do—he invests simple, familiar songs with power and deep emotion.

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type is used to pick out some of the more notable performers in town. . . . ¶ Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives that are subject to last-minute change; it is therefore always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

ALGONQUIN HOTEL, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—**WESLIA WHITFIELD** is making her Oak Room début. The singer, who made her name on the San Francisco cabaret circuit, counts Tony Bennett and Michael Feinstein among her admirers. Her four-week program, titled "Beautiful Love," focusses on classic American songwriters. Dining.

BALLROOM, 253 W. 28th St. (244-3005)—A cool green music hall that features a steady stream of international pop and cabaret stars, as well as the occasional drag queen. The Ballroom is also a tapas restaurant—if you haven't had dinner, you may never make it to the show. **DAVE FRISHBERG,** a singer, pianist, and songwriter, is here for the next couple of weeks. Frishberg has been compared to Sondheim for his craftsmanship and to Porter for his sharp social commentary. Many of his tunes—"Peel Me a Grape," "My Attorney Bernie"—have become cabaret standards. His pianistic skills aren't to be overlooked, either; in his early days, he played piano with a long list of jazz notables.

BIRDLAND, 2745 Broadway, at 105th St. (749-2228)—This northern restaurant-bar, an airy two-tiered space with pastel walls and potted greenery, is a shade too slick for Columbia students but just right for post-collegiate jazz fans. The name is taken from the long-gone midtown pleasure dome that featured Bird himself. Dining.

BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, a gift shop, and, of course, those incredible shrinking aisles that turn a mid-set dash to the rest room into something of a steeplechase. Trumpeter **MAYNARD FERGUSON** is in swing through April 3. Dining.

BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—A great black loft that's jammed with row after row of tables—it looks a little like the site of a standardized test. Despite the cramped quarters, though, the Bottom Line is a pleasant place to take in a show of folk or rock. **JOHN WESLEY HARDING,** who's here on April 1, has described his music as "folk noir." "All my songs are intensely depressing," the young Brit said recently. "Everybody is unhappy, and everybody dies." His most recent album, "Why We Fight," is his best yet: he sounds completely self-assured, whether the subject is love on the wane or fascism on the rise. Onstage, Harding is acerbic and irreverent, and he's also a master of that dying art known as taking requests. Other events: **DARLENE LOVE** through March 31; **LEO KOTTKE** on April 2; and **OREGON** on April 3. Burgers, fries, and other things to make your heart beat faster.

BRADLEY'S, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—The art collection in this neighborhood restaurant, bar, and jazz club is a curator's worst nightmare. Fortunately, the musicians who gather round the Steinway each night are usually more harmonious. **GEORGE CABLES, SANTI DEBRIANO,** and **WINARD HARPER** are here through April 3. The **PETE MALINVERNI** quartet is in on April 4. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, for the next month or so, **DIXIE CARTER.** Ms. Carter has become something of a regular here, and with good reason. She's an engaging performer, with a strong voice and abundant Southern charm. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** presides at the piano.

CHINA CLUB, 2130 Broadway, at 75th St. (877-1166)—Glam-seekers come here hoping to rub shoulders with models and celebrities. It's the kind of place with some rooms you can go into and others you can't. Decorative touches include a big aquarium over the bar, Chinese folding screens, and snapshots of the fabulous partying at the club. Once in a while, rock stars show up to jam after a performance in town. At other times, you'll find a roster of heavy-metal-leaning upstarts. Dress is come-as-if-you-were-in-L.A.

CORNELIA STREET CAFÉ, 29 Cornelia St. (989-9319)—In the basement of this tucked-away Village restaurant-bar is a narrow, white-brick-walled room, decorated with a few tables and steampipes, where you'll find music, poetry readings, and theatre-of-the-cramped. The restaurant itself is a wine-and-candlelight neighborhood café. Downstairs, there's a do-it-yourself, sixties-coffeehouse aesthetic at work. Singer Jonathan Rabb is here, with the Skip Weinstock trio, on April 2. Boel Dirke, Andy Fite, and Charlie Krachy will be in on April 3.

EAGLE TAVERN, 355 W. 14th St. (924-0275)—Where swordfish leap on almost every wall. Where a cat with black and white spots sometimes walks the length of the bar. Where barbirds stare at sports on the tube. And where, between the Sinatra and Streisand that emanate from the jukebox, one can often hear snatches of live folk and Irish music floating in from the back room. Marie Reilly and Annmarie Acosta will be working out on the fiddle, piano, and tin whistles on April 2. Ireland's **SEAN NUA,** with uilleann piper Joe McKenna and harpist Antoinette McKenna, will be in on April 4.

FAT TUESDAY'S, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7900)—One of the city's top jazz spots—thanks largely to the club's talent bookers. But watch your head. Trumpeter **AL GREY,** who played in the Count Basie band, on and off, for three decades, is here with his sextet through April 4. On Mondays, guitarist-inventor **LES PAUL** leads a trio. Dining.

FIVE SPOT, 4 W. 31st St. (631-0100)—The latest entrant in the jazz-club sweepstakes. Set in a mammoth turn-of-the-century ballroom, the space is all marble and gilt, with a few modern touches, such as the zebra-patterned carpeting in the V.I.P. room upstairs. The much sought-after, Grammy-laden saxophonist David Sanborn opened the Five Spot recently, but it remains to be seen if the club can continue to snag topflight musicians. (Miles Davis opened Indigo Blues, after all.) **RICHARD ELLIOT** and **FATTBURGER** perform through April 4. Dining.

IRVING PLACE, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St.—This two-floor establishment has been all things to all people: meeting hall, rock club, jazz club, Off Broadway theatre. Physically, the place is sagging a bit, but it has an odd, dingy charm. The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday night. **GEORGE GEE** and his orchestra perform on April 4. Mr. Gee, a short, stocky, ebullient leader, doesn't play an instrument with the group but, rather, acts as conductor, announcer, and cheerleader, punching [illegible] air at opportune moments. The band, which includes an impressive array of musicians, plays a variety of swing tunes. Mr. Gee puts his horn section to effective use, which really pays off on the band's Count Basie numbers. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

J'S, 2581 Broadway, at 97th St. (666-3600)—A jazz room, one steep flight up from the Upper West Side hurly-burly. **NANCY MARANO** and **EDDIE MONTEIRO** are in on March 31. On April 3, the **EVE ZANNI** quintet, featuring Ken Peplowski, will take the stage. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY, 47 E. Houston St., near Mulberry St. (219-3055)—Situated in a neighborhood that boasts the Puck Building to the

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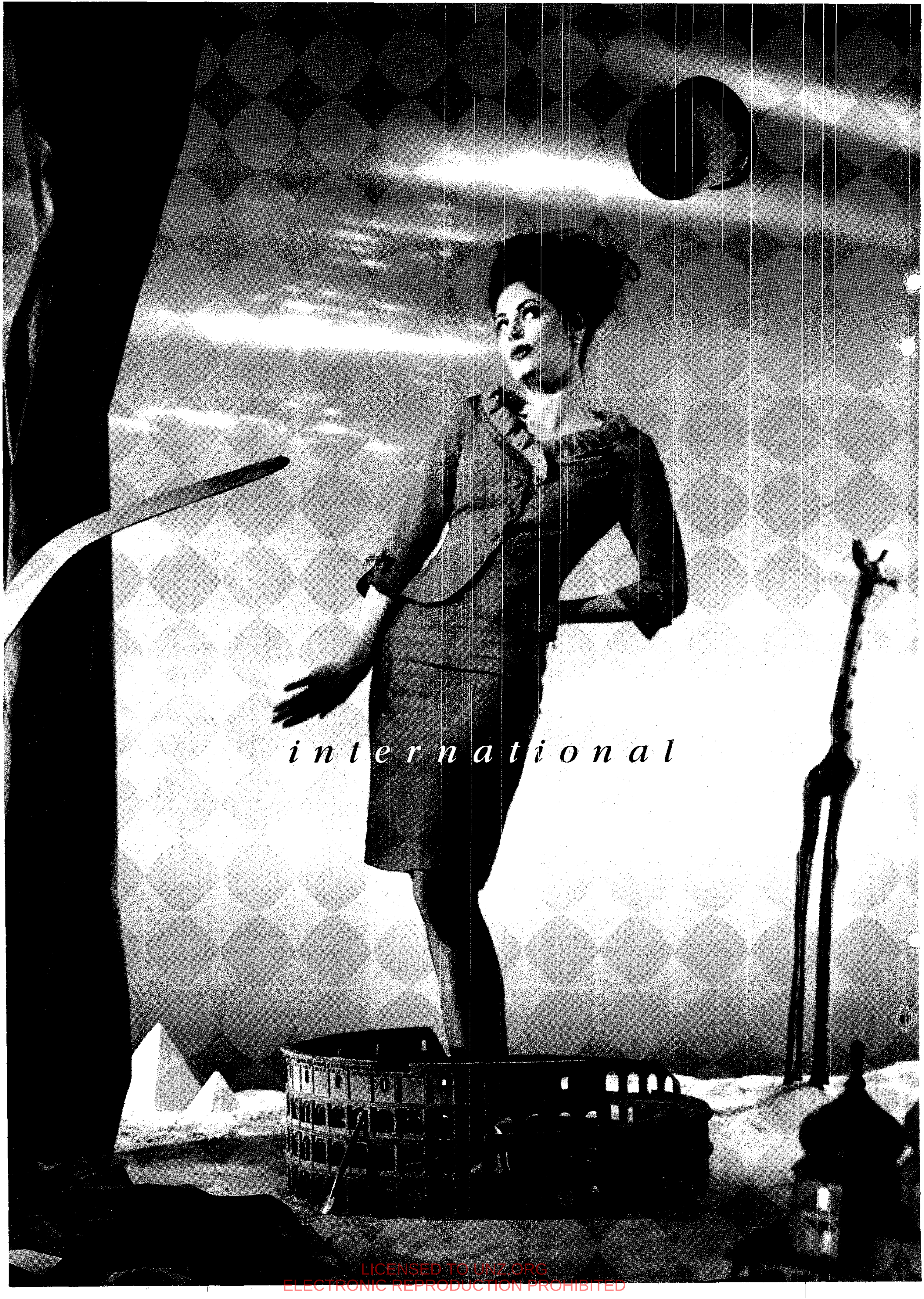
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NIGHT LIFE—Cont'd

west and a host of windshield washers to the east, this modest space provides a forum for free-thinking musicians. **FREEDY JOHNSTON** is here on April 2. Johnston is a Kansas-born singer-songwriter who plays rock with country and folk inflections and who writes songs that are often about rootlessness, whether psychic or physical. Johnston's heartfelt, propulsive second album, "Can You Fly," is one of last year's most impressive outings.

LA CAVE ON FIRST, 1125 First Ave., at 62nd St. (759-4011)—An Upper East Side bistro with a varied schedule. Blues singer **BOB GADDY** performs on Tuesday nights. Blues Wing will be in on April 2 and the New World Jazz Quartet on April 3.

LONE STAR ROADHOUSE, 240 W. 52nd St. (245-2950)—Twang spoken here. **JONATHAN RICHMAN** appears April 1-3. With the Modern Lovers in the late seventies, Richman produced some of pop's most defiantly whimsical songs. If he sometimes verges on preciousness, he's also one of the genre's masters of throwaway irony, and he can build a song on unlikely conceits (fraying bluejeans, Picasso's pickup techniques). Richman's new album, "I, Jonathan," is one of his best. Dining.

RAINBOW & STARS, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. (632-5000)—Intimate nineties glitter. The performers, with their backs to the window, have to compete with a view of the Hudson, the George Washington Bridge, and beyond. "A Grand Night for Singing," an appealing, well-produced Rodgers and Hammerstein revue, which includes a raft of fine young performers, continues its run here. Dining. Closed Mondays.

RED BLAZER TOO, 349 W. 46th St. (262-3112)—A place where a fella and a gal can put on the feedbag, get a little tight, and cut a rug. Mondays belong to pianist Macy Blackburn, Tuesdays to Sam Ulano and his Swingers, Thursdays to Stan Rubin's big band, Fridays to Lew Anderson's big band and Cathy Chamberlain and the Ace-in-the-Hole band, and Saturdays to Bob Cantwell and His Stompers.

RUSSIAN TEA ROOM, 150 W. 57th St. (265-0947)—It's last call to check in at this landmark's upstairs cabaret before it goes on a two-week spring break. On April 4, the club's modest stage will be entrusted to **LARRY WOODARD,** a fluent singer and pianist who's been known to sit at the keyboard for hours, playing complex improvisations on everything from opera to Broadway to Tin Pan Alley. Joining him in this one-night stand will be soprano **MARVIS MARTIN,** whose credits rise as high as the Metropolitan Opera, and who can be counted on for some high-class Gershwin and more. Dining and, of course, drinking.

SPACE AT CHASE, 98 Third Ave., at 12th St. (475-1407)—One of those East Village joints where, for a few bucks, you can hear a handful of local rock bands. As is usually the case at these establishments, some of the bands will make you want to cower under the pinball machine while others will make you want to dance and shout and start your own independent label.

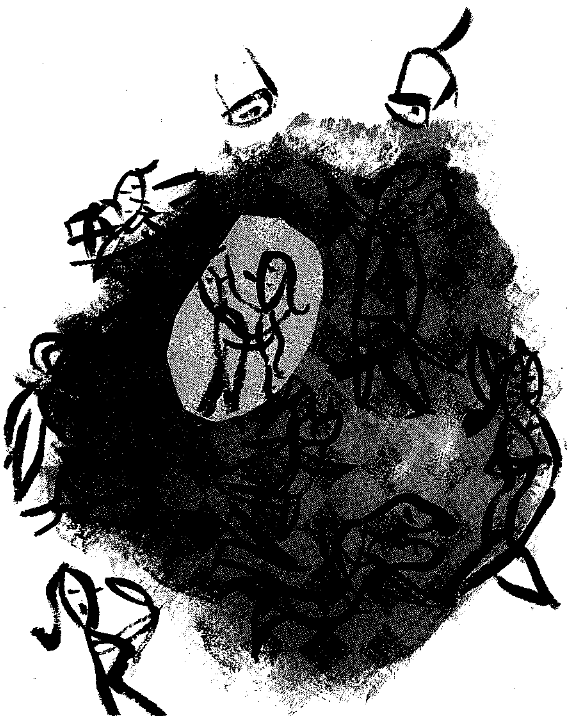
SUPPER CLUB, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—Upstairs is the Blue Room, a plush little nook, outfitted with celestial wallpaper. The remarkable jazz singer **JIMMY SCOTT** is on hand April 1-3.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—One seldom sees jazz musicians leaning back to back as they kick out the jams, or craning their necks to harmonize into a mike. That's not to say that they don't interact onstage, but they're usually more subtle about it than rockers are. The nod, the glance, the faint smile are their preferred gestures, and this brown-toned ski chalet of a jazz club is a fine place to study such group dynamics. The **NAT ADDERLEY** quintet is here for the next couple of weeks. An electrified big band belonging to trumpeter **MILES EVANS** is in action on Mondays. Dining.

TAVERN ON THE GREEN, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—In the heart of the heart of this legendary indoor-outdoor eatery is one of Manhattan's newer jazz spots, the Chestnut Room. **SUSANNAH MC CORKLE** is currently performing. Closed Mondays.

TIME CAFÉ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Hidden inside this sleek and trendy restaurant is a two-story club called Fez. Upstairs is a sumptuous Moroccan bar and lounge. The downstairs room, where bands perform, is rather plain in comparison, but still a sleek and comfortable spot to take in a show. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** packs them in every Thursday. The fourteen-piece ensemble, directed by tenor saxophonist Craig Handy and trombonist Sam Burtis, concentrates exclusively on the tricky, cacophonous work of its catalyst, the late Charles Mingus. Dining.

TRAMPS, 45 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—A spacious and agreeable club located near what was once called Ladies' Mile but might now be termed the pool-hall district. The pillared, loftlike room is decorated in a hodgepodge, vaguely Bourbon Street manner, and sight lines are above average. **ETTA JAMES** is here through April 1. In her fifth decade as a singer, Ms. James is finally receiving wide recognition as a rock and soul pioneer (she was recently inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame) and as a blues role model (Janis Joplin and Bonnie Raitt owe a lot to her sexy-mama style). The recording industry is treating her right, too. Her latest album, "The Right Time," captures the grit and feistiness she has always brought to her live performances. On a good night, she makes the earth move.



VILLAGE GATE, 160 Bleecker St. (475-5120)—In the gym-size downstairs room—which, with its black walls, black pillars, and black pipes and ducts, resembles a live-in Nevelson sculpture—trumpeter Clark Terry and Diva, an all-women jazz orchestra, will play on March 31 in a benefit performance.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The late Max Gordon, who opened this holiest of jazz shrines in 1935, once described the club's early patrons as a mix of "poets, W.P.A. writers, hustlers, broads on the make, and moochers." The **JOSHUA REDMAN** quartet, with Kevin Hays, Christian McBride, and Brian Blade, works out through April 4. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

EDGE OF NIGHT LIFE

GEORGES LEFEBVRE has a dream. It's a dream about you, baby, coming to Vingt Deux, there to schmooze, play chess or backgammon, and sup at his tables made of metal salvaged from the Brooklyn Bridge. Lefebvre figures you're especially eager for this alternative if you're about his age (twenty-six), and tired of big clubs, velvet ropes, and d.j.s as deities, since you've been there and done that, as he has, since you were thirteen. Someone else once had the same dream, of course, and it begat Nell's, the *boîte intime* that redefined front-door arrogance.

Lefebvre, though, has run clubs [illegible] his native Paris, that citadel of salon brutality, and he sounds more evolved than jaded when he swears that Vingt Deux will never throb to the drone of disco or fall to the mercy of "Café Tabac's ten-dollar crowd—the group that only spends money on what they're wearing, not at the bar. And we're going to institute an *à la bouteille* policy"—buy a bottle from the house and it will be set aside for your exclusive use. "We'll serve cold food and great desserts, play jazz and fusion, and discourage trendoids and Eurotrash. We'll make Vingt Deux an extension of your living room."

Then why the Bain-Douchey name? "It looks better on a business card than Twenty-Two," he replies. "And it is the address." Twenty-two what, though? "Well, it's where the Milk Bar used to be. Look, we want people to find out for themselves, slowly. Let it take a while." Obviously, this guy's from out of town.

IN ANOTHER CATEGORY—PERFORMANCE ART, ETC.

RINGLING BROTHERS AND BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS—In its hundred-and-twenty-third edition. (Madison Square Garden. Through May 2. For information about show times and tickets, call 465-6000.)

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL—The Montreal-based outfit has a new show, "Saltimbanco." (Battery Park City. For information about tickets, call 809-6969.)

"THE EASTER SHOW"—The annual extravaganza, complete with Rockettes, opens April 2 at 7:30 and runs through April 17. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. For information about show times and tickets, call 247-4777.)

ICE THEATRE OF NEW YORK—The ensemble of skaters presents a program of four wor[illegible] (The Rink at Rockefeller Center, Fifth Ave. at 50th St. March 31 at 1 P.M. No tickets necessary.)

JUDITH JACKSON—Presenting "Pygmies in the Rain Forest," which incorporates live music by Nana Vasconcelos and capoeira (a Brazilian dance/martial-art form) by Loremil Machado and Edna Lima. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. April 1-3 at 8 and April 4 at 3. Through April 11.)

P.S. 122—April 1-4 at 9: Jane Comfort and Company in "Faith Healing," a new dance-theatre piece. With guest artist Mark Dendy. Through April 10. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

ART

Sheltering the Sky

DOROTHEA ROCKBURNE recently completed a pair of floor-to-ceiling frescoes, "Northern Sky" and "Southern Sky," in the marble-clad Sky Lobby of Sony's new offices, in Philip Johnson's Chippendale Building (550 Madison Avenue, at 55th Street). Rockburne is a grand precisionist. Over the past three decades, she has seemed to allude to a number of the more exact sciences, from astronomy to origami, in effecting impeccably rigorous—and influential—abstract works on paper. Like her contemporary Sol LeWitt—whose most recent wall drawings, surprisingly, suggest Rothko—Rockburne is generally considered more of a Conceptualist than a painter. You might think that the chill, gleaming Sky Lobby—a space worthy of Ayn Rand—would overpower a sensibility as refined as Rockburne's. But her cosmological frescoes suit it to perfection. Rockburne is no naturalist, yet these works reveal a rapturous attentiveness to nature's displays. Recessed behind and visible through the post-and-lintel structures supporting the two big opposing arches of the lobby, "Southern Sky" and "Northern Sky," with their shrill and brilliant primary colors and their imperiously whizzing lines, seem to be broadcasting the values of the New York School as far as the orbit of Pluto.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Daumier Drawings" is the first major exhibition devoted specifically to the drawings of Honoré Daumier (1808-79). Daumier was a working artist in the modern sense, a lithographer by trade and a savage pictorial satirist whose lampoons of King Louis Philippe once landed him in jail. The show contains more than a hundred of his caustic masterpieces, including "The Drunkenness of Silenus," "The Legislative Belly," and the saturnine "Doctor Prunelle." Through May 2. . . . ¶ The Greeks learned the art of stone-carving from the Egyptians, but they soon introduced innovations of their own; for instance, they discovered a way to make their statues entirely freestanding, as is demonstrated by several works in "The Greek Miracle: Classical Sculpture from the Dawn of Democracy." This remarkable exhibit of more than forty statues, stelae, busts, and figures from the fifth century B.C. features such archetypal works as the "Kritios Boy," whose tilted head and pelvis give the figure a naturalistic asymmetry that represents a new conception of beauty. Through May 23. . . . ¶ Paintings from fifteenth-century China, in "Painters of the Great Ming: The Imperial Court and Zhe School." Through May 9. . . . ¶ "Splendid Legacy: The Havemeyer Collection." More than four hundred and fifty works—from Islamic pottery and Tiffany Favrile glass, to Manets, Monets, and Degases—from the Havemeyer family's modest agglomeration. . . . ¶ "The Waking Dream: Photography's First Century" presents rare prints from 1839 to 1939. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

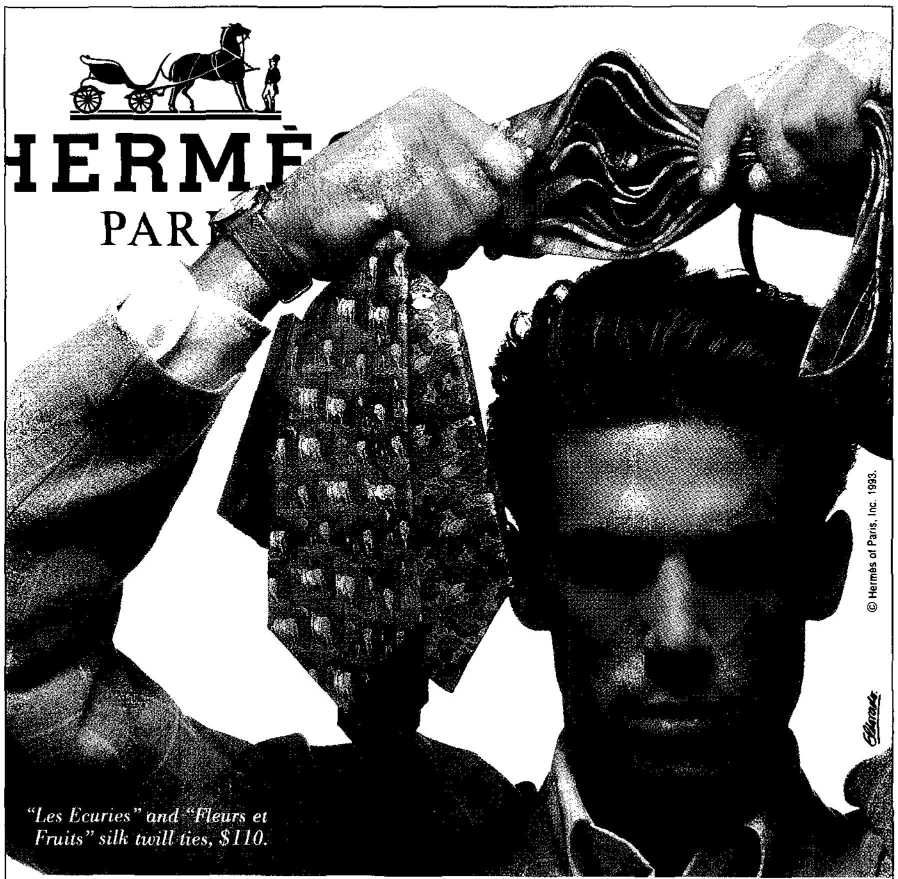
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St.—"Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism" comprises two hundred and thirty paintings, relief sculptures, collages, drawings, and prints. Through May 2. . . . ¶ "Thinking Is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys." According to legend, Beuys (1921-1986) was always drawing. It was for him the medium of both reflection and regeneration, and a drawing sensibility pervaded most of his work. One issue that this very rich show is addressing, then, is the thorny one of just where drawing begins and ends with Beuys. For example, there's "Directional Forces," a massive work consisting of a hundred easel-size blackboards that Beuys covered with notations and diagrams during a marathon series of lectures about "social sculpture," which he delivered in London in 1974. During those lectures, he would throw the blackboards on the floor as he finished with them. In this particular commemorative installation, the blackboards are arrayed in haphazard piles, with three left on easels—a pretty problem in classification. Through May 4. . . . ¶ "Recent Acquisitions: Photography" presents some thirty works that reflect the diversity of the museum's collection. Through April 6. (Open daily, except Wednesdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—Following the irritating complacency of the Lothar Baumgarten show—another myopic European scolding America for its sins against indigenous peoples—the Goog has for the moment left politics to the Whitney and mounted "Picasso and the Age of Iron," which contains more than ninety works, by Picasso, Alexander Calder, Alberto Giacometti, Julio González, and David Smith. Sculpted iron, bronze, brass, and steel seem particularly suited to the austerity of the Guggenheim. As you wind along the ramp toward the summit, past Smith's arc-welded abstractions, González's woven rods and ribbons, and Calder's fragile mobiles, you find such masterworks as Picasso's Cyclopean "Head" (1964) and Giacometti's delicate, life-size "Capsizing Man" (1950). Through May 16. . . . ¶ "Osmosis," a collaborative installation by sculptors Ettore Spalletti and Haim Steinbach. (Open daily, except Thursdays, 10 to 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM SOHO, 575 Broadway—With its current exhibition, "Four Rooms and a House Ball: Pop and the Everyday Object," it feels like Old Home Week here. The show includes the once outrageous, now classic "Flag," by Jasper Johns; "Large Coca-Cola," by Andy Warhol; and "Four Rooms," by Jim Dine. The House Ball of the title refers to a gigantic, jolly prop, by Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, for a theatrical work performed in Venice in 1985. (Open daily, except Tuesdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday through Saturday evenings until 10.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—Like one of those Russian *matrioshki*, this Biennial, boasting the work of more than eighty American artists, is a show within a show within a show. You could spend days here if you were diligent about combing all the installations, reading all the texts, and watching all the videos—much of the material evincing a concern for sociopolitical issues. Better to go with the flow and not ask whither. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM, Eastern Parkway—"Manet to Picasso: Prints and Drawings from the Brooklyn Museum." Thirty-five masterworks on paper, all made in France between 1870 and 1940, by, notably, Degas, Renoir, Cézanne, Matisse, and, of course, Édouard and Pablo. Through May 23. . . . ¶ "Fancy Feet: A Historic Collection of Ladies' Footwear" demonstrates how shoe design often reflects the times. The exhibit ranges from the sixteenth century through the twentieth. . . . ¶ More than twenty paintings



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ART—Cont'd

and works on paper by Leon Polk Smith. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St.—The museum is displaying the skeleton of Jumbo, the world-famous elephant who reigned as "The Towering Monarch of His Mighty Race" in the Barnum & Bailey Circus. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St.—"Gods, Guardians, and Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India, A.D. 700-1200" presents more than sixty carved-stone figures and other temple ornaments. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Grolier Club, 47 E. 60th St.—Great text and commensurate art, in "The American Livre de Peintre." James Joyce paired with Henri Matisse, Samuel Beckett with Jasper Johns, and so on, in more than sixty limited-edition books. Through May 15. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St.—Thomas Jefferson had admirably legible penmanship, which makes the autograph letters and other documents here accessibility itself. And his lucid style is astonishing to ears accustomed to the inanities of modern bureaucrats. The exhibit also includes letters from Lafayette and Czar Alexander I, a copy of the first printing of the Declaration of Independence, and much more. Through April 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10:30 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

Museum for African Art, 593 Broadway—"Secrecy: African Art That Conceals and Reveals." The museum recently relocated to an old cast-iron building on lower Broadway. The theme the curators have chosen for the inaugural show is, in effect, a way of not talking about the objects—a novel approach that replaces modernist formalism and old-style condescension with a distancing respectfulness. The exhibit showcases more than a hundred masks, figures, textiles, and architectural pieces, all from traditional sub-Saharan societies. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, 11 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 11 to 8.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St.—"Bob Bishop: A Life in American Folk Art." As director of the museum from 1977 to 1991, Bishop strove to expand the narrow definition of folk art. The hundred-some-odd works from his personal collection on view reflect his eclectic vision. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

The New Museum, 583 Broadway—The representation and reconfiguration of urban spaces, and the movement of people and things through such spaces, are the focal points of a show called "In Transit." Installations, photographs, and objects by more than thirty contemporary artists. Through April 11. . . . ¶ "Skin Deep," a show of abstract works, all containing references to skin and pigment. Through April 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, noon to 8.)

National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—The hundred-and-sixty-eighth annual juried exhibition includes oil paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, pastels, and watercolors. Starts April 1. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5; Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—"Assault on the Arts: Culture and Politics in Nazi Germany." The infamous Goebbels—who once tried, unsuccessfully, to become an artist—considered politics the ultimate art form and Fascism a way of "forming the solid and complete image of the people." This intriguing show of more than two hundred posters, prints, and paintings—some censored or banned, others state-sponsored and glorified—examines art under a regime that believed "blood and race will once more become the source of artistic intuition." Included here are a striking 1921 Paul Klee lithograph that was deemed "degenerate" and compared unfavorably with the work of an anonymous German mental patient, and a small placard about American jazz saxophonist Artie Shaw (whose real name was Arthur Jacob Arshawsky), who enjoyed wide critical acclaim in Germany until 1941, when the Nazis finally discovered that he was *not* the son of George Bernard Shaw. Through May 28. . . . ¶ "Christian Boltanski: Books, Prints, Printed Matter, Ephemera." Boltanski's haunting photogravure etchings—of apparition-like faces on the verge of vanishing—seem to suggest loss and unrealized experience. Through May 15. . . . ¶ "America Moves West: Images of an Expanding Nation." More than fifty drawings, watercolors, and photographs chronicling American migration in the nineteenth century. Through May 22. (Open Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5:45.)

Queens Museum of Art, Flushing Meadow Park—Ten works by Keith Haring: eight drawings, one sculpture, and a sixty-foot mural. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

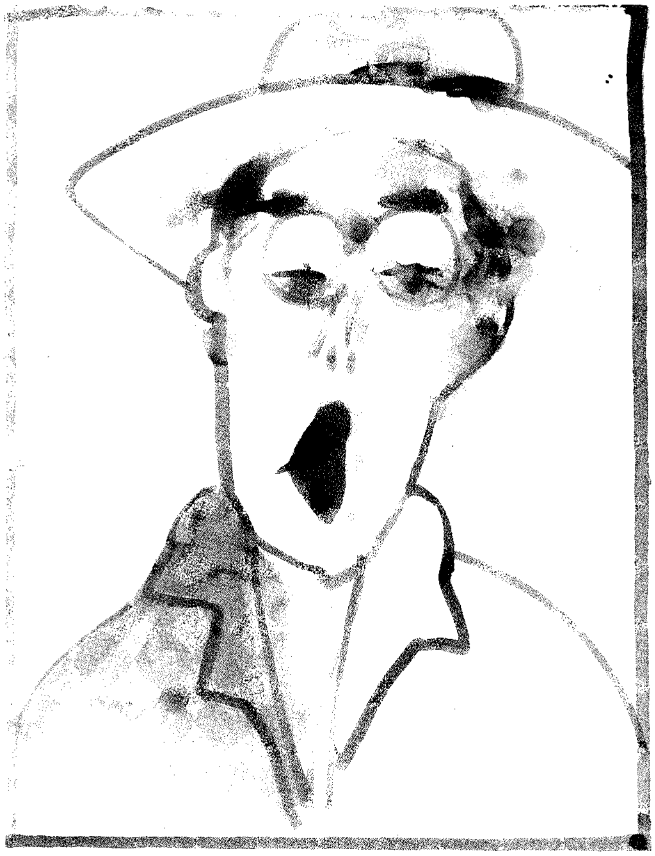
GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Rochelle Feinstein—For some time now, Feinstein has been preoccupied with the grid in her paintings. In her previous show, the grids were colorful and a little bent out of shape; the paintings on view here have taken these attributes to an extreme—the lines blur or zigzag or, in some instances, meld and disappear. Her colors tend toward the cheerful—pink and violet and creamy white—but a subtext of anger and frustration undercuts this mood, and the contrast is pleasing. The grid paintings here, like "Big A Go Go," are more like hallucinations of grids, as though something ordered and pretty had begun to dissolve. Through April 17. (Beitzel, 102 Prince St.)

Richard Serra—"Intersection II" is a powerful new sculpture consisting of four Cor-ten-steel walls, thirteen feet tall and more than fifty feet long, which run roughly parallel to one another and down the length of the gallery. The outer walls curve in and out in gentle balletic movements that belie their mass, and the inner walls curve out in the middle to form a concave, almond-shaped space. Compared with the artist's other, more threatening works, "Intersection II," though it is just as grandiose, harbors intimacy. It also makes clearer than ever Serra's inversion of sculpture and drawing—the lines of the heavy steel plates curve gently, as if freely drawn in space, while the solid black forms of his drawings stand rigidly on paper, like stone or metal. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. . . . ¶ A show of Serra's drawings is on view at Gagosian uptown, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. Both through April 17.)

Short List—**ILAN AVERBUCH:** Hoffman, 429 West Broadway. Through May 17. . . . **MARCO BAGNOLI:** Marcus, 578 Broadway. Through April 3. . . . **MARTIN BALL:** Stephen Rosenberg, 115 Wooster St. Through April 10. . . . **JOSEF BEUYS:** Gibson, 568 Broadway. Through April 3. . . . **SARAH CHARLESWORTH** and **ALLEN RUPPERSBERG:** Gorney, 100 Greene St. Through April 24. . . . **JAY DE FEO:** Klagsbrun, 51 Greene St. Through April 17. . . . **ARTURO DUCLOS:** Nosei, 100 Prince St. Through April 22. . . . **JENE HIGHSTEIN:** Klein, 594 Broadway. Through May 9. . . . **PELLO IRAZU** and **CAROLE SEBOROVSKI:** Weber, 142 Greene St. Through April 17. . . . **DONALD JUDD:** Pace, 142 Greene St. Through April 24. . . . **ON KAWARA:** Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. Through April 24. . . . **ED MOSES:** Louver, 130 Prince St. Through April 24. . . . **THOMAS NOZKOWSKI:** Protetch, 560 Broadway. Through April 24. . . . **DAVID RABINOWITCH:** Flynn, 113 Crosby



Self-portrait by William King.

St. Through April 30. . . . **PAUL REBEYROLLE:** Briet, 558 Broadway. Through April 3. . . . **MARJORIE STRIDER:** Zarre, 154 Wooster St. Through April 3.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Nayland Blake/Roni Horn—This San Francisco artist was so lavishly praised during his New York début, three years ago, that it seemed as if he couldn't go anywhere but down. Fortunately, absence has somewhat tempered that skepticism; and, in any case, Blake's newest works—highly fetishized multimedia tableaux—are less theatrical in presentation than that earlier work, more ambitious for being more modest, stronger for their stance of vulnerability. Most of the scenes have to do with homosexual identity, and the artist, appropriately, likes to mix his metaphors. A hooded body suit, for example, which suggests sexual oppression as well as the K.K.K., is made of sheer, shimmery lingerie material, and a mask that has threatening slit eyes also has bunny ears. A rack of costume accessories includes crowns, bloody masks, elf shoes, and Father Time's scythe. / Four large watercolors by a postminimalist sculptor. They are attractively, even meticulously designed but are overly precious. Some involve poems. One especially clever one consists of stanzas about love, by Emily Dickinson, written out in lines that are grouped across the paper like clusters of pick-up sticks. Through April 24. (Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St.)

Tibor Csernus—This Hungarian artist's paintings owe a lot to Caravaggio's dramatic lighting and complicated figural groupings, and even to his subject matter. Some of the paintings have Biblical themes, but most depict darkened rooms in which some kind of sexual initiation seems to be occurring. The latter paintings, full of rosy-fleshed boys and girls, also have an unexpected resemblance to the work of Eric Fischl, not only in their content but in their expressionistic approach to traditional figuration. How odd that we are at a moment when the trajectory of an ostensibly cutting-edge artist and that of a clearly academic figure painter have looped around and met at a point of disconcerting similarity. Through April 17. (Stiebel Modern, 32 E. 57th St.)

Willem de Kooning—Robert Mnuchin, the retired head of the equity-trading department of Goldman, Sachs, has allocated a floor and a half of his town house to a gallery, which he runs in partnership with James Corcoran, the veteran Los Angeles dealer. Their first public exhibition comprises paintings that de Kooning made between 1975 and 1979, and it is a stunner. At a time when younger painters seemed to lack all conviction, and following a period of unevenness in his own development, de Kooning was reborn as a painter, and wherever one turns in this impeccably installed show of lyrical, fiery abstract landscapes one sees the evidence. Through April 24. (C&M Arts, 45 E. 78th St.)

William King—A hilarious show of new stainless-steel and aluminum works by the master of the stiffly nimble figure. Most of them are larger than life-size. There are men frozen in the process of unbuttoning their wire or polyester-mesh pants and women caught forever in the act of hiking up their equally tacky skirts. Through April 17. (Dintenfass, 50 W. 57th St.)

Jack Levine/Group Show—New paintings by a veteran social satirist. The artist continues to work in his blurry, fractured style, one which suggests how the world might look to Mr. Magoo if his glasses were cracked in a thousand places. What is most refreshing about these works, all of which depict Biblical stories, is that as the artist has aged—he is now seventy-nine—so have his subjects. Levine's Jonah looks like he has cataracts, and, in a hilarious "Adam and Eve: Expulsion," even the hand of God looks arthritic. / An attractive small show of good drawings, prints, and paintings by American social realists of the twenties, thirties, and forties, from Reginald Marsh to Peter Blume. Through April 17. (Midtown-Payson, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

Short List—**PIERRE ALECHINSKY:** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. Through April 24. . . . **DENNIS ASHBAUGH:** Marisa del Re, 41 E. 57th St. Through April 24. . . . **FRANCIS BACON:** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. Through April 27. (Open Mondays). . . . **WILL BARNET:** Dintenfass, 50 W. 57th St. Through April 17. . . . **MARCEL BROODTHAERS:** Werner, 21 E. 67th St. Through April 17. . . . **RALSTON CRAWFORD:** Hirschl & Adler, 21 E. 70th St. Through April 24. . . . **DANIEL DALLMANN:** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. Through April 17. . . . **HERBERT FERBER:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. Through April 3. . . . **WOLF KAHN:** Borgenicht, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through April 10. . . . **YVES KLEIN:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. Through April 17. . . . **JOEL PERLMAN:** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. Through April 17. . . . **CLIFFORD ROSS:** Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. Through April 3. (Open Mondays). . . . **THOMAS SCHÜTTE:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. Through April 24. (Open Mondays.)

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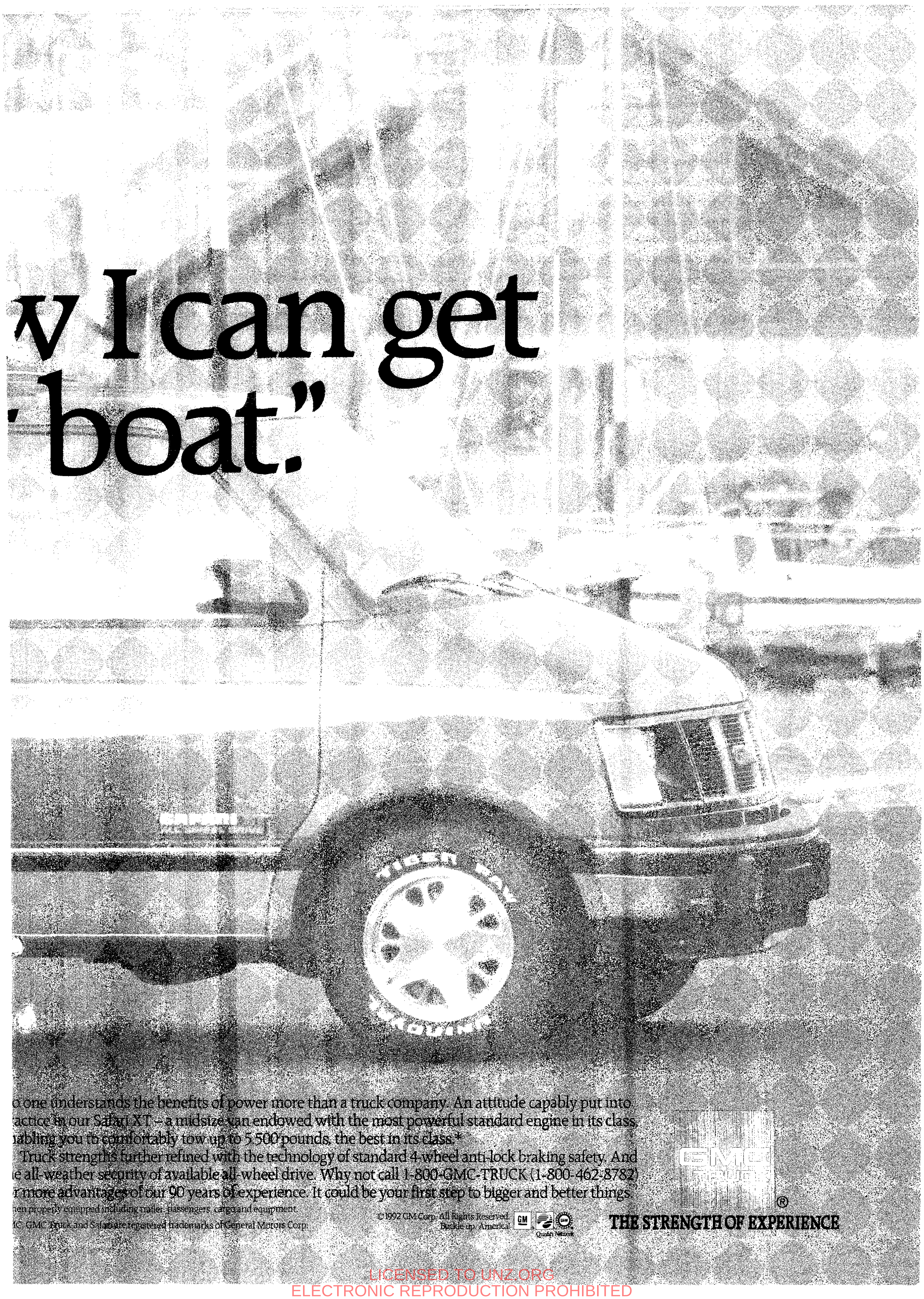

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THE STRENGTH OF EXPERIENCE

PHOTOGRAPHY

First Takes

IN the days before last week's luxe opening of "The Waking Dream" at the Metropolitan Museum, a much quieter but perhaps even sparkier gathering was taking place there. The pictures that had been chosen for the show—two hundred and fifty-three of them, all taken during photography's first century (1839-1939), and all from the vast collection of the Gilman Paper Company—were being brought together in the Met galleries by Maria Morris Hambourg, the Met's curator of photography, and Pierre Apraxine, the curator of the Gilman collection. These images had not only survived all the accidents that can befall an object, but were now being presented in the kind of show that photography rarely gets.

Both "The Waking Dream" and its superb catalogue are informed by serious scholarship and impressive connoisseurship, but these attributes have not been allowed to overwhelm the look and feel of the pictures, or the stories they tell. In this exhibition, narrative doesn't suffer in the name of the history of photography—which is, in a way, the subject of the show. Beyond the record of invention that's on view, there's so much to see and sense that it's not possible to be bored. For instance, on a wall of photographs in the section titled "Picturing Victorian Britain" is one of Lewis Carroll's portraits of Alice Liddell, and nearby is a photograph, by Hugh Diamond Welsh, titled "Patient, Surrey County Lunatic Asylum." Those two images alone are so charged with the currents that lay below that era's surface that it's hard to stop looking.

Brassaï—An exquisite show of vintage prints, most of them from the thirties, all of them taken in Paris, and some of them by now very famous. Through May 1. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St.)

Walker Evans (1903-75)—Color Polaroids, from 1973-74, whose ostensible subject matter is handmade signs. But it is Evans' eye and brain, his sense of color and language and texture, which are really on display. These small intensifications of seeing fuse language and art in a way one associates with the paintings of Jasper Johns, say, or Cy Twombly. Through April 10. (Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St.)

Short List—Keith Carter: Witkin, 415 West Broadway. Through April 10. . . . **Dennis Farber:** Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. Through April 10. . . . **Nancy Goldring:** Baum, 588 Broadway. Through May 1. . . . **Emil Heilborn:** Mann, 42 E. 76th St. Through April 10. . . . **Thomas Ruff:** 303 Gallery, 89 Greene St. Through April 17. . . . **Roman Vishniac:** International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. Through April 18. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8). . . . **Joel-Peter Witkin:** Pace-MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. Through April 24.

(*See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art.*)

MUSIC

Different Notes

JESSYE NORMAN is always best when she allows her musical curiosity to take her someplace where her big voice and fierce energy will be challenged (or even surprised). She loves the great literature of German Romantic song, but sometimes she can be precious there, sharing foregone conclusions. There was nothing of the sort in her thrilling Jocasta, in "Oedipus Rex," or in her unnamed sufferer in "Erwartung." So if the part of her April 4 Carnegie Hall program that sells tickets is the group of songs by Robert Schumann, the parts that raise anticipation are Benjamin Britten's ironic "On This Island" and Messiaen's pressing, thrusting, complex "Poèmes pour Mi." And since James Levine can become especially interesting in music that stretches him as a pianist (which not much does), the Messiaen is a doubly exciting prospect. Will both artists' long experience with Berg prove a stimulant or a sedative in his "Seven Early Songs"?

If Ms. Norman's show sells out, lovers of the unusual in song can turn to the ever-adventurous New York Festival of Song's program "Songs of the Irish Poets"—in its downtown home (the Greenwich House Music School) on the same afternoon—where they'll hear what music composers have tried to add to the spoken music of Yeats, Wilde, Joyce, and Thomas Moore.

Russell Sherman at the Miller Theatre.

BART GOLDMAN

(*The box-office number for the Metropolitan Opera House is 362-6000; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 362-8719; and for the Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St., 854-7799.*)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—La Traviata, with Tiziana Fabbricini, Neil Rosenshein, and Sherrill Milnes; conducted by Placido Domingo. (March 31 at 8 and April 3 at 8:30.). . .With Samuel Cristler conducting. (April 6 at 8.). . . **Ariadne auf Naxos,** with Jessye Norman, Tracy Dahl, Susanne Mentzer, Thomas Moser, and Thomas Stewart; Ion Marin. (April 1 at 8.). . .**Lucia di Lammermoor,** with Sumi Jo, Alfredo Kraus, Lucio Gallo, and Paul Plishka; Michelangelo Veltri. (April 2 and April 5 at 8.). . . **Die Walküre,** with Gwyneth Jones, Mechthild Gessendorf, Christa Ludwig (bidding farewell to our city's stages), Gary Lakes, James Morris, and Matti Salminen; James Levine. (April 3 at 12:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House.)

Magic Circle Repertory Ensemble—Presenting a pair of chamber operas—"A Childhood Miracle" and "Hearing"—and "Four Dialogues" (a song cycle for soprano, tenor, and two pianos), all by Ned Rorem. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. April 2 at 8. For information about tickets, call 279-4200.)

"The Resurrection Play of Tours"—Not an opera, *exactly, but surely an ancestor.* Frederick Renz directs the Ensemble for Early Music in a staging of his own Easter sepulchre drama, pieced together from various medieval sources, but principally from a twelfth-century "Ludus Paschalis" from the Diocese of Tours. (Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 923-3700. April 3 at 3 and April 4 at 1 and 3.)

RECITALS

Russell Sherman—Since 1967, a stream of intellectually inclined piano students has flowed through the Boston studio of Russell Sherman, a champion of the new as well as the familiar, whose readings range from the untraditional to the provocative. Though he performs sporadically, Sherman's recitals at his alma mater (he was in Columbia's class of '49) seem to have become annual affairs. This time around, he'll perform Beethoven's C-Major Sonata (Op. 53), Schoenberg's "Six Pieces" (Op. 19), Scriabin's Sonata No. 4, Gunther Schuller's "Sonata/Fantasia" (in its New York première), and several works by Liszt. (Miller Theatre. March 31 at 8.)

Arrivederci, Monteverdi—Lest the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Monteverdi's death pass unobserved, soprano Sarah Pillow and harpist Jan Walters, plus several colleagues, will perform a wide-ranging selection of his works, as well as compositions by three of his followers: Giacomo Carissimi, Luigi Rossi, and Antonio Stradella. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. March 31 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

Eroica Trio—Performing piano trios by Beethoven (in C Minor), Martinů (his "Five Short Pieces"), and Dvořák (the "Dumky"). A benefit concert. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. March 31 at 8. Admission by contribution.)

András Schiff—This year's Schubertiade draws to an end as the pianist concludes his survey of Schubert's sonatas. March 31 at 8: The "Fünf Klavierstücke" (D. 459/459a, sometimes purveyed as a "Sonata in E"), plus the Sonatas in A Minor (D. 537) and A Major (D. 959). . . . April 3 at 8: The Sonatas in F Minor (D. 625, in its three-movement form, without the D-Flat Adagio that is sometimes appended), E-Flat (D. 568), and B-Flat (D. 960). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Nordic Exposure—The Norwegian pianist Einar Steen Nokleberg continues his sesquicentennial-birthday salute to Edvard Grieg ("the infinitesimal Grieg," to quote George Bernard Shaw) by completing his exhaustive traversal of the composer's piano music. March 31 at 8: Four volumes of "Lyric Pieces" and some "Melodies of Norway." (Steinway Hall, 109 W. 57th St. No tickets necessary.). . . April 1 at 8: The G-Minor Ballade, among other works. (Steinway Hall, 109 W. 57th St. No tickets necessary.). . . April 2 at 8: Another four volumes of "Lyric Pieces" and more "Melodies of Norway." (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. No tickets necessary.). . . April 3 at 8:30: The "Holberg Suite," the last volume of "Lyric Pieces" (Op. 71), and the "Norwegian Peasant Dances" (Op. 72). (Weill Recital Hall.)

Bargemusic—Though in 1896 he failed an audition to join the Vienna Opera Orchestra (presumably for poor sight-reading), Fritz Kreisler found himself embarked on a solo career by the turn of the century; he would reign as one of the world's preëminent fiddlers until he retired half a century later, in 1950. Kreisler also composed, with his oeuvre including two operettas, "semi-classical" bon-bons ("Caprice Viennois," "Liebesfreud," etc.), cadenzas to standard violin concertos, and numerous pieces "in the olden style," many of which he pawned off as resurrected works by obscure eighteenth-century masters. His most ambitious effort in serious composition was his A-Minor String Quartet, written in 1919, which will receive a rare performance from violinists Ik-Hwan Bae and Paul Rosenthal, violist Paul Neubauer, and cellist Ronald Thomas. Also on the program are two other minor-key string quartets, by Haydn (the "Fifths") and by Schubert (the "Death and the Maiden"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. April 1 at 7:30 and April 4 at 4.)

Chou Wen-Chung—A seventieth-birthday tribute to the composer, in which five of his works will be rendered by the New Music Consort, Boston Musica Viva, and Speculum Musicae. (Merkin Concert Hall. April 1 at 8.)

New York Consort of Viols—Performing an all-German program, with the assistance of tenor John Olund and harpsichordist Dongsok Shin; including works by Heinrich Isaac, Ludwig Senfl, Paul Hofhaimer, Erasmus Widmann, Michael Praetorius, and Theodor Schwartzkopff (a Baroque composer associated with the court of Stuttgart—and no relation to Elisabeth, or Norman). (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. April 1 at 8. For information about tickets, call 580-9787.)

Paula Robison—The flutist and numerous colleagues perform music by Purcell, Bach, Sylvius Leopold Weiss, and Gluck, but mostly by Vivaldi. (Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. April 2-3 at 7.)

Anonymous 4—This women's quartet has evolved into the "fab four" of medieval music: who could have foreseen that their recent recording of a fourteenth-century "English Ladymass" (on Harmonia Mundi) would currently be No. 12 on *Billboard's* classical chart? They'll present music and poetry, from the twelfth century through the fourteenth, relating the story of the Passion from the Virgin Mary's point of view, including three very different settings of the Stabat Mater. (St. Michael's Church, Amsterdam Ave. at 99th St. April 2 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

Stony Brook Contemporary Chamber Players—Performing premières of works by Wayne Peterson, David Dzubay, Osvaldo Golijov, David Soley, and David Stock. (Miller Theatre. April 3 at 8.)

Yefim Bronfman—The pianist performs Prokofiev's Sonata No. 5, Beethoven's Sonata in E-Flat (Op. 31, No. 3), and Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition." (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. April 4 at 3.)

Si-Yo Music Society—Presenting chamber works by Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, and Dvořák. (Merkin Concert Hall. April 4 at 3.)

Michael Parloff—The Metropolitan Opera's principal flutist performs an all-Bach program, with the help of flutist Julius Baker, English horn player John Ferrillo, bassoonist Patricia Rogers, cellist Jerry Grossman, and harpsichordist Gerald Ranck. (Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, Madison Ave. at 73rd St. April 4 at 4. Admission by contribution.)

New York Festival of Song—Presenting settings of Irish poetry, by Britten, Barber, Mendelssohn, and others. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. 242-4770. April 4 at 5.)

Jessye Norman—Soprano, singing Britten's cycle "On This Island" (to poems by Auden), five songs by Schumann, Berg's "Sieben Frühe Lieder," and Messiaen's "Poèmes pour Mi"; with pianist James Levine. (Carnegie Hall. April 4 at 7.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Concert Royal—James Richman leads his period-instrument group in a half dozen concerti grossi: Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" (featuring violinist Lisa Rautenberg), as well as Vivaldi's A-Minor Concerto (Op. 3, No. 6) and Bach's D-Minor Two-Violin Concerto (in which Cynthia Roberts shares the spotlight). (Merkin Concert Hall. March 31 at 8.)

Australian Chamber Orchestra—Richard Tognetti leads the ensemble in works by Handel, Mozart (his Symphony No. 29), and Janáček; classical guitarist John Williams is featured in a pair of Vivaldi concertos and the New York première of Peter Sculthorpe's "Nourlangie." (Carnegie Hall. March 31 at 8.)

Mannes Orchestra—Michael Charry conducts the student orchestra in Telemann's G-Major Viola Concerto (featuring David Wallace), Schumann's Piano Concerto (with Mariko Kaneda), and Stravinsky's "Le Sacre du Printemps." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. April 1 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

New England Conservatory Symphony Orchestra—Michael Tilson Thomas conducts a tribute to the late cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, which will spotlight the English cellist Steven Isserlis, who has been named the recipient of the conservatory's 1993 Piatigorsky Artist Award. On the program: the "Imaginary Coney Island Scene" from Bernstein's "On the Town," Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite," and the New York première of John Tavener's "The Protecting Veil" (featuring Mr. Isserlis). (Carnegie Hall. April 2 at 8.)

Amor Artis Chamber Choir and Orchestra—Johannes Somary directs one of Josquin Desprez's two settings of the "De Profundis," Johannes Ockeghem's "L'Homme Armé" Mass, seventeenth-century oratorios by Schütz (his "Seven Last Words of Christ") and Marc-Antoine Charpentier (his "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre"), and Bach's motet "Jesu, meine Freude." (St. Jean Baptiste Church, Lexington Ave. at 76th St. April 2 at 8. For information about tickets, call 874-4513.)

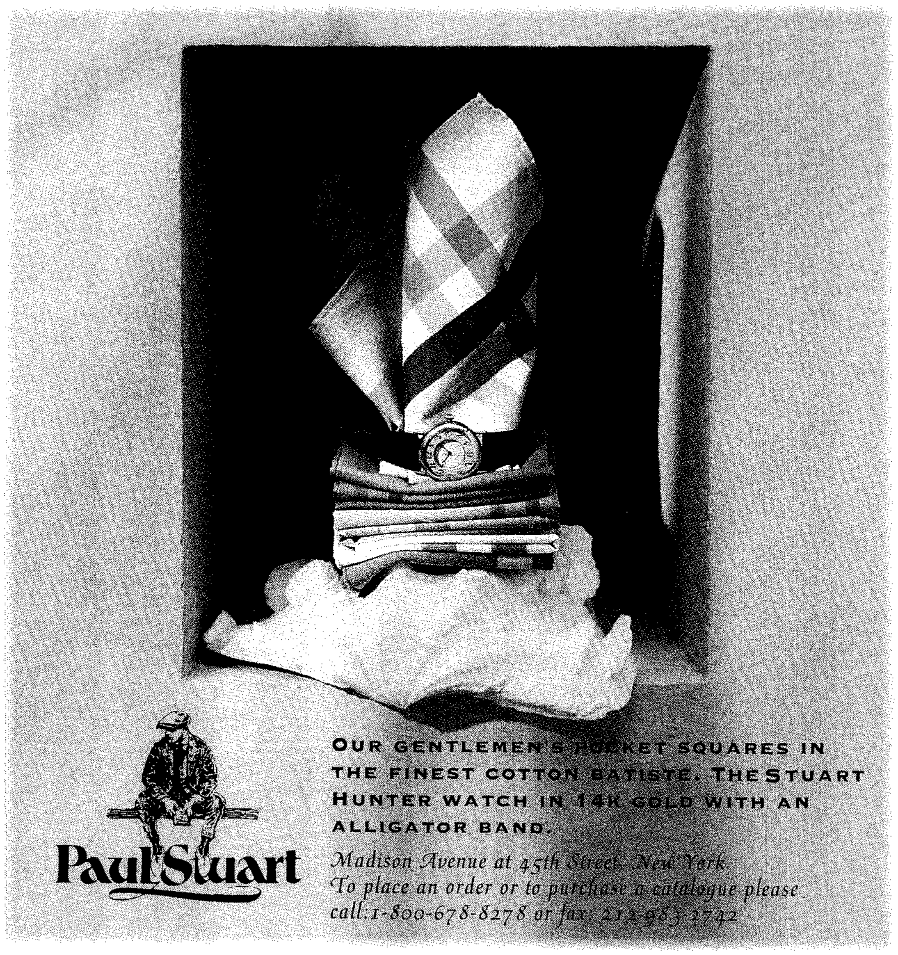
Manhattan School of Music Philharmonia—David Gilbert conducts Messiaen's "Les Offrandes Oubliées," Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings (featuring tenor Matthew Chellis and horn player Jeffrey McGuire), and Beethoven's jovial Symphony No. 8. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. April 2 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Stonewall Chorale—Presenting an all-American program, including a recent work by Chris DeBlasio. (Haft Auditorium, Fashion Institute of Technology, 227 W. 27th St. April 3 at 8. For information about tickets, call 608-4504.)

New York Virtuosi Chamber Symphony—Kenneth Klein conducts Bach's D-Minor Harpsichord Concerto (with Elaine Comparone), Schuman's "Song of Orpheus" (featuring cellist Nathaniel Rosen), Turina's "Oración del Torero" (a string quartet, here scaled up for string orchestra), and Beethoven's Symphony No. 1. (Miller Theatre. April 4 at 3.)

Cathedral of St. John the Divine Choirs—Bruce Fifer directs Bach's Cantatas No. 131 and No. 182, as well as little Mozart's "Grabmusik" (K. 42); with an instrumental ensemble. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. April 4 at 3:30. Admission by contribution.)

New England Symphonic Ensemble—A choral and instrumental ensemble of high-school students, performing Vaughan Williams' "Serenade to Music" and Mozart's Missa Brevis (K. 192). (Carnegie Hall. April 5 at 8. For information about tickets, call 239-4699.)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JAZZ/POP/ROCK PERSONAL APPEARANCES

Lindsey Buckingham—Fleetwood Mac's loss is an immense gain for fans of Buckingham's obsessively self-contained studio rock. "Out of the Cradle," his third solo album, is by turns haunting, very odd, and magnificent. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 31 at 8.)

Grateful Dead—Jerry Garcia, until recently the unhealthiest man in rock music (previous title-holders: Keith Richards and David Crosby), has faced the fact that good health is a prerequisite for a long, strange trip. Back in tip-top shape after a vice-induced collapse and near-death experience last summer, Garcia has given himself another chance to play his fat, shiny, liquid guitar notes for the mass of Deadheads, who will greet his return the only way they know how—ecstatically. (Nassau Coliseum. 1-516 794-9300. March 31-April 2 and April 4-5 at 7:30.)

Dinosaur Jr—The game of picking out alternative-rock influences and discovering echoes of grunge forerunners in a band's style and sound has achieved a new level of hairsplitting absurdity in the coverage of this Massachusetts group. But it is definitely an accomplishment of some kind to manage to remind listeners of everyone from Nirvana to the Replacements to Sonic Youth to Neil Young. It's even better, however, to make the kind of enthralling and vehement drunken-guitar music that appears on the band's new album, "Where You Been." (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. April 2 at 8.)

Black Uhuru—Reggae, like jazz, is bubbling up everywhere in pop these days, and this heavyweight band plays the deep-dyed real thing. Once or twice during the past decade, the group seemed poised to assume the musical mantle left behind by Bob Marley, but repeated personnel changes prevented a steady rise. With the release of a fine new album, "Mystical Truth," Black Uhuru is still on the path. With the Wailers, Andrew Tosh, and Louie Rankin. (Apollo, 253 W. 125th St. 864-0372. April 3 at 7 and 11.)

Ugly Kid Joe—With Animal Bag and Collision. (Academy, 234 W. 43rd St. 307-7171. March 31 at 8.)

Quicksand—With Therapy? and Surgery. (Academy. April 3 at 8.)

"Foot Stompin' Folk"—John Cephas and Phil Wiggins, Mike Seeger, and the Georgia Sea Island Singers. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. April 2 at 8.)

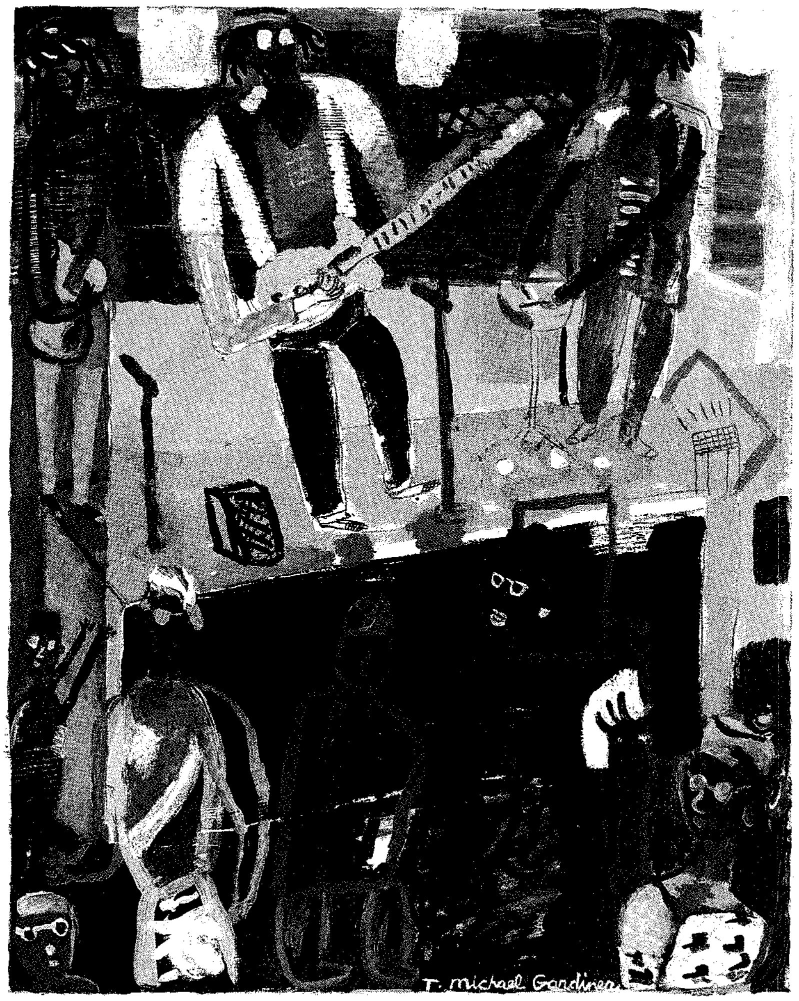
Steven Curtis Chapman—Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. April 3 at 8.

World Kulintang Institute Ensemble— With guest artists. (Queens College Concert Hall, Colden Center for the Performing Arts. 1-718 793-8080. April 3 at 8.)

Inkhay—Music and folk dances of the Andes, in a performance geared to children. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. April 4 at 3.)

"In Celebration of Life 2"—A benefit concert, with Ann Hampton Callaway, Liz Callaway, Jason Graae, Karen Mason, Lillias White, the cast of the musical "Wings," and others. (Church of St. Paul the Apostle, Columbus Ave. at 60th St. April 4 at 8. For information about tickets, call 978-9390.)

Drivin' 'n' Cryin'—Limelight, Sixth Ave. at 20th St. 807-7850. April 4 at 10.



Black Uhuru at the Apollo Theatre.

T. MICHAEL GARDINER

SPORTS

(The Yankees play at Yankee Stadium, 293-6000; the Mets at Shea Stadium, 1-718 507-8499; the Knicks and the Rangers at Madison Square Garden, 465-6000; the Islanders at the Nassau Coliseum, 1-516 794-9300; and the Nets and the Devils at the Meadowlands Arena, 1-201 935-3900.)

Knicks—Vs. the Cleveland Cavaliers, April 1 at 7:30.

Nets—Vs. the Miami Heat, March 31. . . . ¶ Vs. the Indiana Pacers, April 6. (Game time, 7:30.)

Rangers—Vs. the Islanders, April 2. . . . ¶ Vs. the Hartford Whalers, April 5. (Game time, 7:30.)

Islanders—Vs. the Montreal Canadiens, April 3 at 7:35.

Devils—Vs. the Pittsburgh Penguins, April 4 at 7:35.

Bats, Balls, and Bases—Baseball this year welcomes the Colorado Rockies, the Florida Marlins, and George Steinbrenner redux. But there's a lot to cheer about, too; for instance, the world-class combo of Mattingly and Boggs in the Bronx, or, say, a healthy Gooden and Saberhagen pitching in Queens. Could this be the year? The exhibition season concludes here with a make-believe Subway Series (April 3 at Shea and April 4 at Yankee Stadium; game times 1:40 and 1:30, respectively). It won't count, of course, but it's too early in the year for realism.

Mets—Opening day is April 5, vs. the Colorado Rockies, at 2:10.

Don't Look Back—Wishing for eyes in the backs of their heads, participants in the seventh annual April Fools' Backwards Mile will be putting their best foot backward as they rewind around the Great Lawn (mid-Central Park at 81st St.), at 12:30 P.M. on April 1. (For more information, call 860-4455.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Put on Your Easter Bonnet—At the seventh annual Easter Bonnet Competition, where theatre companies design bonnets inspired by their shows, there will be millinery Judy Garland only dreamed about. The hats will be displayed March 31 through April 6 at Mamma Leone's Ristorante (261 W. 44th St.). Then, on April 6 at 4 and April 7 at 5, celebrities will perform skits and musical numbers centered on the hats, at the Broadway Theatre (Broadway at 53rd St.). After the finale, there will be awards in several categories, including best over-all bonnet. Tickets at the door on the days of the benefit events.

Honoring Jumbo—An old-fashioned circus parade, complete with clowns, acrobats, horses, elephants, and antique wagons from the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, will leave on March 31 at 9:45 from Madison Square Garden, travel up Eighth Avenue to Columbus Circle, go through Central Park, and arrive about an hour later at the American Museum of Natural History (Central Park West at 77th St.). In a salute to Jumbo, who once ruled the Barnum & Bailey Circus and whose skeleton is on display at the museum, the elephants will execute a "long mount," wherein each pachyderm stands on its hind legs and rests its forelegs on another elephant's back.

Orchidaceae—Several members of the far-flung orchid family will be getting together at the twelfth annual Greater New York Orchid Show. There will be fragrance judging, lectures, and demonstrations. (Winter Garden, World Financial Center, Battery Park City. For more information, call 945-0505. April 1-3, from 10 to 8, and April 4, from 10 to 5. No tickets necessary.)

Snow White and Lancelot—Actors, including "Fool Moon" star Bill Irwin, will give dramatic readings from the work of Donald Barthelme and Walker Percy. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 645-5848. April 5 at 7:30.)

Readings—April 1 at 8: Calvin Trillin will read from his new book, "Remembering Denny." (Three Lives & Company, 154 W. 10th St. No tickets necessary.). . . ¶ April 2 at 7: Toni Morrison will read from her own fiction. (Bobst Library, New York University, 70 Washington Square S. No tickets necessary.). . . ¶ April 2 at 8: Agha Shahid Ali and Jessica Hagedorn will read from their own work. (West Side Y, 5 W. 63rd St. Tickets at the door on the night of the reading.). . . ¶ April 4 at 4: John Taggart and Marjorie Welish will read from their own poetry. (Alliance Stage, 197 East Broadway, at Jefferson St. No tickets necessary.). . . ¶ April 4 at 8: Umberto Eco will read from "Misreadings," his new book of essays. (92nd Street Y. Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Weekend Walks—April 4 at 1: Lower East Side Passover shopping and Jewish history; sponsored by Big Onion Walking Tours. For more information, call 439-1090.

Memoranda—March 31 is April Fools' Day—not!. . . ¶ April 4 is Palm Sunday. Also, daylight-saving time begins at 2 A.M. Set clocks an hour ahead. . . . ¶ April 5 at sundown marks the beginning of Passover.

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FILMS ACCOMPANIED BY A DAGGER ARE DESCRIBED IN "MOVIES IN BRIEF," STARTING ON PAGE 30.

EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000)
Theatre 1: Through April 1: "Enchanted April" (directed by Mike Newell), with Joan Plowright. From April 2: "Léolo" (Jean-Claude Lauzon, in French).
Theatre 2: "The Crying Game" (†).
Theatre 3: "Mac" (John Turturro).
Theatre 4: "Strictly Ballroom" (†).
Theatre 5: "Like Water for Chocolate" (Alfonso Arau; a Mexican film, in Spanish).
Theatre 6: Through April 1: "Bad Lieutenant" (Abel Ferrara), with Harvey Keitel. From April 2: "Okoge" (Takehiro Nakajima, in Japanese).

Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)
Through April 1: "Jit" (Michael Raeburn).
From April 2: (Separate admissions) "Jit"; "Nosferatu" (1922, F. W. Murnau; a German silent film), with Max Schreck; and "Rock Huston's Home Movies" (Mark Rappaport).

Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th. (477-6600)
Theatre 1: "The Opposite Sex and How to Live with Them" (Matthew Meshekoff), with Arye Gross and Courteney Cox.
Theatre 2: Through April 1: "Passion Fish" (John Sayles), with Mary McDonnell. From April 2: "Jack the Bear" (†).
Theatre 3: "Point of No Return" (John Badham), with Bridget Fonda.

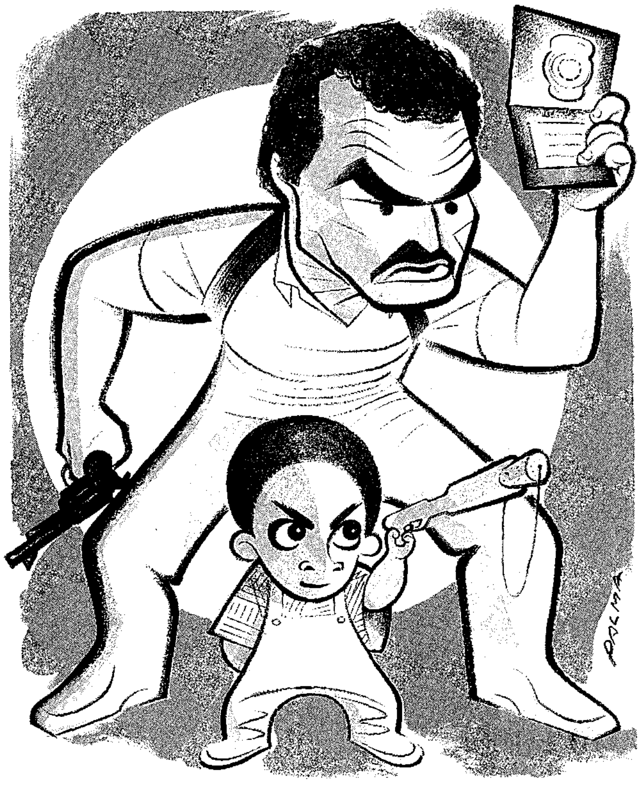
Village Theatre VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th. (982-0400)
Theatre 1: "El Mariachi" (†).
Theatre 2: "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III" (Stuart Gillard).
Theatre 3: "Fire in the Sky" (†).
Theatre 4: "Just Another Girl on the I.R.T" (†).
Theatre 5: "Married to It" (Arthur Hiller).
Theatre 6: "Falling Down" (Joel Schumacher), with Michael Douglas.
Theatre 7: "Groundhog Day" (†).

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th. (924-3363)
Through April 1: "Last Call at Maud's" (Paris Poirier).
April 2-3: "The Blue Angel" (1929, Josef von Sternberg; in German) and "Morocco" (1930, von Sternberg), both with Marlene Dietrich.
April 4-6: "Blonde Venus" (1932, Josef von Sternberg) and "Shanghai Express" (1932, von Sternberg), both with Marlene Dietrich.

Village East Cinemas, 2nd Ave. at 12th. (529-6799)
Theatre 1: "The Last Days of Chez Nous" (†).
Theatre 2: "Swing Kids" (Thomas Carter), with Robert Sean Leonard and Christian Bale.
Theatre 3: Through April 1: "Damage" (Louis Malle), with Jeremy Irons and Miranda Richardson. From April 2: "The Adventures of Huck Finn" (Stephen Sommers), with Elijah Wood and Courtney B. Vance.
Theatre 4: (Matinées only) "Aladdin," an animated film; and (evenings only) "Amos & Andrew" (E. Max Frye), with Nicolas Cage and Samuel L. Jackson.
Theatre 5: "Howards End" (James Ivory).
Theatre 6: "Born Yesterday" (Luis Mandoki), with Melanie Griffith, John Goodman, and Don Johnson.
Theatre 7: "Unforgiven" (†).

19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th. (260-8000)
Theatre 1: "Born Yesterday" (Luis Mandoki), with Melanie Griffith, John Goodman, and Don Johnson.
Theatre 2: "Watch It" (†).
Theatre 3: "Point of No Return" (John Badham), with Bridget Fonda.
Theatre 4: "Married to It" (Arthur Hiller).
Theatre 5: "Fire in the Sky" (†).
Theatre 6: "Unforgiven" (†).

Gramercy, Lexington at 23rd. (475-1660)
(Separate admissions) "A River Runs Through It" (Robert Redford), with Craig Sheffer and Brad Pitt; and "A Few Good Men" (Rob Reiner).



Burt Reynolds and Norman D. Golden II in "Cop and a Half."

Bay Cinema, 2nd Ave. at 32nd. (679-0160)
"Hear No Evil" (Robert Greenwald), with Marlee Matlin.

Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th. (689-6548)
Theatre 1: "CB4" (†).
Theatre 2: "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III" (Stuart Gillard).
Theatre 3: Through April 1: "Married to It" (Arthur Hiller). From April 2: "The Adventures of Huck Finn" (Stephen Sommers), with Elijah Wood and Courtney B. Vance.
Theatre 4: "Born Yesterday" (Luis Mandoki), with Melanie Griffith, John Goodman, and Don Johnson.

34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th. (532-5544)
Theatre 1: "Fire in the Sky" (†).
Theatre 2: "The Opposite Sex and How to Live with Them" (Matthew Meshekoff), with Arye Gross, Courteney Cox, Kevin Pollak, and Julie Brown.
Theatre 3: "Point of No Return" (John Badham), with Bridget Fonda.

34th St. East, 241 E. 34th. (683-0255)
Through April 1: "Mad Dog and Glory" (†).
From April 2: "Jack the Bear" (†).

Sutton 1 and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th. (759-1411)
Theatre 1: "The Crying Game" (†).
Theatre 2: Through April 1: "The Crying Game" (†). From April 2: "The Adventures of Huck Finn" (Stephen Sommers), with Elijah Wood and Courtney B. Vance.

Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th. (759-2262)
Through April 1: "Passion Fish" (John Sayles), with Mary McDonnell.
From April 2: "Jack the Bear" (†).

Plaza, 42 E. 58th. (355-3320)
"The Opposite Sex and How to Live with Them" (Matthew Meshekoff), with Arye Gross and Courteney Cox.

Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (935-6420)
Theatre 1: "CB4" (†).
Theatre 2: "CB4" (†).

59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th. (759-4630)
(Matinées only) "Aladdin," an animated film; and (evenings only) "Lorenzo's Oil" (George Miller), with Nick Nolte and Susan Sarandon.

Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (355-1663)
Theatre 1: "Hear No Evil" (Robert Greenwald), with Marlee Matlin.
Theatre 2: "Mad Dog and Glory" (†).

Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th. (753-6022)
Theatre 1: "Born Yesterday" (Luis Mandoki), with Melanie Griffith, John Goodman, and Don Johnson.
Theatre 2: "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III" (Stuart Gillard).
Theatre 3: "Howards End" (James Ivory).

First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd. (752-4600)
Theatre 1: "Strictly Ballroom" (†).
Theatre 2: "Groundhog Day" (†).
Theatre 3: "A Few Good Men" (Rob Reiner).
Theatre 4: Through April 1: "Untamed Heart" (Tony Bill), with Christian Slater, Marisa Tomei, and Rosie Perez. From April 2: "Cop and a Half" (†).
Theatre 5: "Watch It" (†).
Theatre 6: "Scent of a Woman" (†).

Gemini 1 and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th. (832-1670)
Theatre 1: "Point of No Return" (John Badham), with Bridget Fonda.
Theatre 2: Through April 1: "Sommersby" (Jon Amiel), with Richard Gere and Jodie Foster. From April 2: "The Crush" (Alan Shapiro), with Cary Elwes and Jennifer Rubin.

Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th. (737-2622)
"Rich in Love" (Bruce Beresford), with Albert Finney.

New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th. (744-7339)
Theatre 1: "Falling Down" (Joel Schumacher), with Michael Douglas.
Theatre 2: "Married to It" (Arthur Hiller).

68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th. (734-0302)
"The Last Days of Chez Nous" (†).

Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st. (879-1313)
"Ethan Frome" (†).

East 85th Street, 1st Ave. at 85th. (249-5100)
"Fire in the Sky" (†).

Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th. (534-1880)
Theatre 1: Through April 1: "Groundhog Day" (†). From April 2: "Cop and a Half" (†).
Theatre 2: "Scent of a Woman" (†).

Orpheum VII, 3rd Ave. at 86th. (876-2400)
Theatre 1: "Mad Dog and Glory" (†).
Theatre 2: "Just Another Girl on the I.R.T" (†).
Theatre 3: "The Opposite Sex and How to Live with Them" (Matthew Meshekoff), with Arye Gross and Courteney Cox.
Theatre 4: Through April 1: "Married to It" (Arthur Hiller). From April 2: "The Adventures of Huck Finn" (Stephen Sommers), with Elijah Wood and Courtney B. Vance.
Theatre 5: "Watch It" (†).
Theatre 6: "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III" (Stuart Gillard).
Theatre 7: "Point of No Return" (John Badham), with Bridget Fonda.

86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th. (249-1144)
Theatre 1: "CB4" (†).
Theatre 2: "Born Yesterday" (Luis Mandoki), with Melanie Griffith, John Goodman, and Don Johnson.

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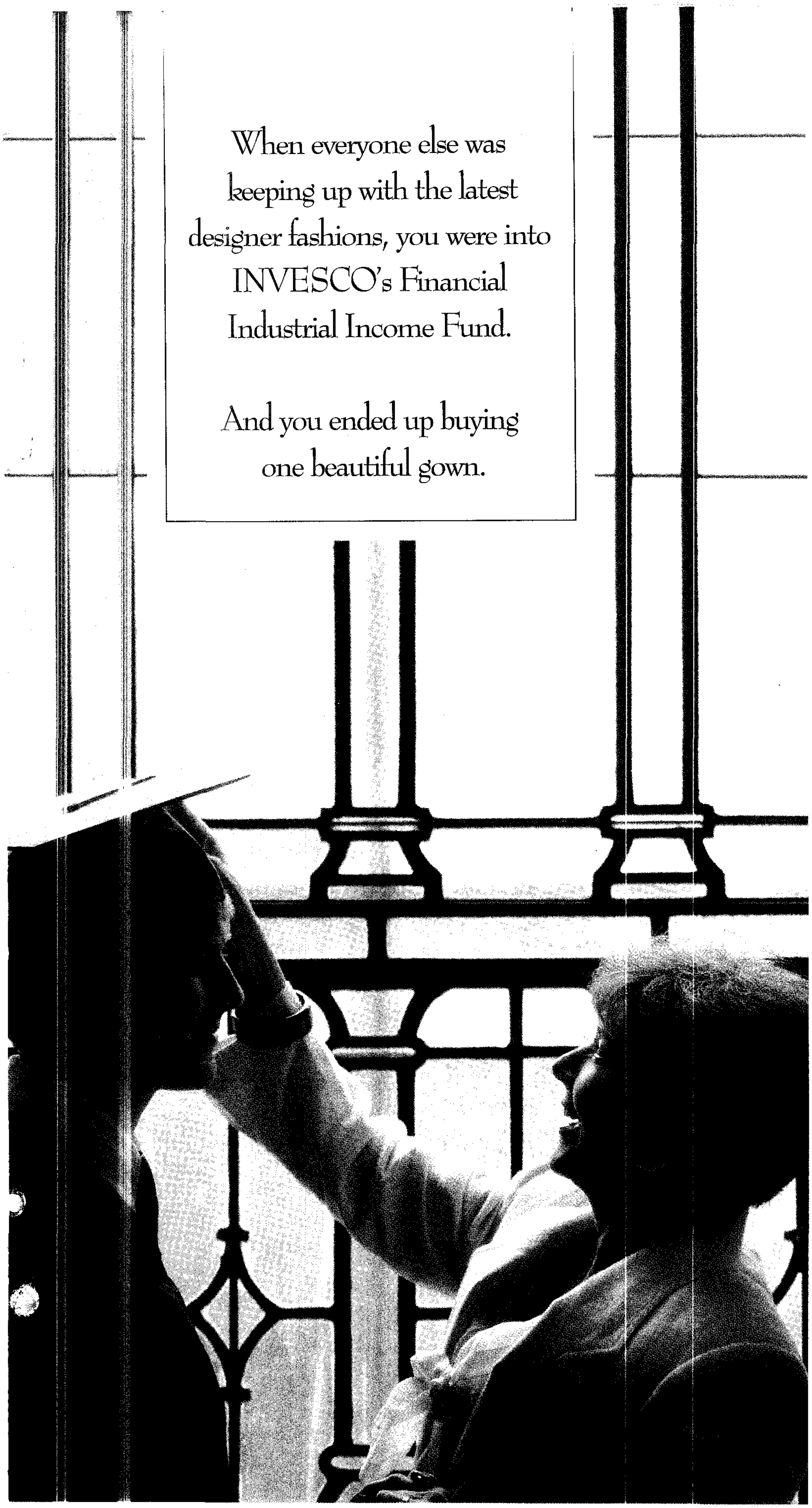

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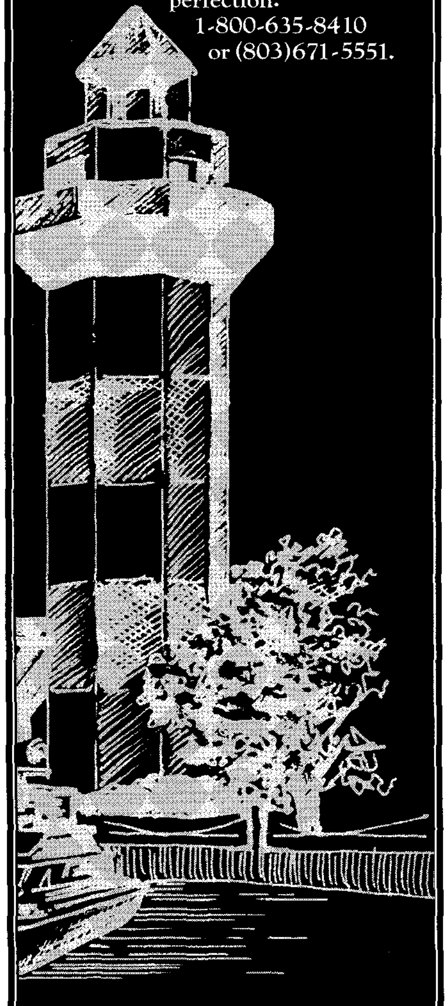

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WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
Theatre 1: "The Appointments of Dennis Jennings" (1989, directed by Dean Parisot), "Pets or Meat: The Return to Flint" (1992, Michael Moore), and "A Sense of History" (1992, Mike Leigh).
Theatre 2: See listings under Revival Houses.
Theatre 3: "Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media" (Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick).

Waverly 1 and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd. (929-8037)
Theatre 1: "Hear No Evil" (Robert Greenwald), with Marlee Matlin.
Theatre 2: "CB4" (†).

Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th. (929-3350)
Theatre 1: "Scent of a Woman" (†).
Theatre 2: Through April 1: "Mad Dog and Glory" (†). From April 2: "Cop and a Half" (†).

Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th. (255-8800)
Theatre 1: "Ethan Frome" (†).
Theatre 2: "Indochine" (Régis Wargnier, in French), with Catherine Deneuve.
Theatre 3: "Riff-Raff" (Ken Loach).
Theatre 4: "Masala" (Srinivas Krishna).

Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd. (691-4744)
Theatre 1: "Rich in Love" (Bruce Beresford), with Albert Finney.
Theatre 2: "Scent of a Woman" (†).
Theatre 3: "Passion Fish" (John Sayles), with Mary McDonnell.
Theatre 4: "Groundhog Day" (†).
Theatre 5: "The Crying Game" (†).
Theatre 6: Through April 1: "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III" (Stuart Gillard). From April 2: "Jack the Bear" (†).
Theatre 7: Through April 1: "Hear No Evil" (Robert Greenwald), with Marlee Matlin. From April 2: "Cop and a Half" (†).
Theatre 8: "Mad Dog and Glory" (†).
Theatre 9: "Falling Down" (Joel Schumacher), with Michael Douglas.

23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd. (989-0060)
Theatre 1: "CB4" (†).
Theatre 2: Through April 1: (Matinées only) "Aladdin," an animated film; and (evenings only) "Untamed Heart" (Tony Bill), with Christian Slater, Marisa Tomei, and Rosie Perez. From April 2: "The Adventures of Huck Finn" (Stephen Sommers), with Elijah Wood and Courtney B. Vance.
Theatre 3: "The Opposite Sex and How to Live with Them" (Matthew Meshekoff), with Arye Gross and Courteney Cox.

Guild, 33 W. 50th. (757-2406)
Through April 1: "A Far Off Place" (†).
From April 2: "The Adventures of Huck Finn" (Stephen Sommers), with Elijah Wood and Courtney B. Vance.

Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between 8th and 9th Aves. (246-1583)
Theatre 1: "Sommersby" (Jon Amiel), with Richard Gere and Jodie Foster.
Theatre 2: "Scent of a Woman" (†).
Theatre 3: "Family Prayers" (Scott Rosenfelt), with Joe Mantegna.
Theatre 4: "Enchanted April" (Mike Newell), with Joan Plowright.
Theatre 5: "A Few Good Men" (Rob Reiner).
Theatre 6: "Groundhog Day" (†).

Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th. (765-7600)
"Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III" (Stuart Gillard).

Festival, 6 W. 57th. (307-7856)
"Passion Fish" (John Sayles), with Mary McDonnell.

57th St. Playhouse, 110 W. 57th. (581-7360)
"Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey" (Duwayne Dunham).

Carnegie Hall Cinemas, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th. (265-2520)
Theatre 1: "Mac" (John Turturro), with Turturro.
Theatre 2: Through April 1: "Like Water for Chocolate" (Alfonso Arau; a Mexican film, in Spanish). From April 2: "Jack the Bear" (†).

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th. (586-1900)
"El Mariachi" (†).

Fine Arts, 4 W. 58th. (980-5656)
"The Lover" (Jean-Jacques Annaud).

Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th. (752-5959)
"Howards End" (James Ivory).

Columbus Circle, B'way at 61st. (247-5070)
"Unforgiven" (†).

62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd. (265-7466)
"Hear No Evil" (Robert Greenwald), with Marlee Matlin.

Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, B'way at 63rd. (757-2280)
Theatre 1: Through April 1: "Tous les Matins du Monde" (Alain Corneau, in French). From April 2: "Léolo" (Jean-Claude Lauzon, in French).
Theatre 2: "Indochine" (Régis Wargnier, in French), with Catherine Deneuve.
Theatre 3: "The Crying Game" (†).
Theatre 4: "Strictly Ballroom" (†).
Theatre 5: "Olivier Olivier" (Agnieszka Holland; in French).
Theatre 6: "Stolen Children" (†).

Regency, B'way at 67th. (724-3700)
Through April 1: "Scent of a Woman" (†).
From April 2: "Cop and a Half" (†).

84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th. (877-3600)
Theatre 1: "Born Yesterday" (Luis Mandoki), with Melanie Griffith, John Goodman, and Don Johnson.
Theatre 2: "Falling Down" (Joel Schumacher), with Michael Douglas.
Theatre 3: "Groundhog Day" (†).
Theatre 4: "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III" (Stuart Gillard).
Theatre 5: "Point of No Return" (John Badham), with Bridget Fonda.
Theatre 6: "Fire in the Sky" (†).

Metro Cinema 1 and 2, B'way at 99th. (222-1200)
Theatre 1: "Untamed Heart" (Tony Bill), with Christian Slater, Marisa Tomei, and Rosie Perez.
Theatre 2: "Mad Dog and Glory" (†).

Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th. (865-8128)
Theatre 1: "The Opposite Sex and How to Live with Them" (Matthew Meshekoff), with Arye Gross and Courteney Cox.
Theatre 2: "CB4" (†).

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th. (354-0900)
Theatre 1: "Just Another Girl on the I.R.T" (†).
Theatre 2: "Hear No Evil" (directed by Robert Greenwald), with Marlee Matlin.
Theatre 3: "Falling Down" (Joel Schumacher), with Michael Douglas.
Theatre 4: "The Opposite Sex and How to Live with Them" (Matthew Meshekoff), with Arye Gross and Courteney Cox.
Theatre 5: Through April 1: "Best of the Best 2" (Robert Radler), with Eric Roberts. From April 2: "The Crush" (Alan Shapiro), with Cary Elwes and Jennifer Rubin.
Theatre 6: "The Crying Game" (†).
Theatre 7: "Point of No Return" (John Badham), with Bridget Fonda.

Embassy 1, B'way at 46th. (302-0494)
"Born Yesterday" (Luis Mandoki), with Melanie Griffith, John Goodman, and Don Johnson.

Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th. (730-7262)
Theatre 1: "Married to It" (Arthur Hiller).
Theatre 2: "Untamed Heart" (Tony Bill), with Christian Slater, Marisa Tomei, and Rosie Perez.
Theatre 3: "Aladdin," an animated film.

Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way. (869-8340)
"Fire in the Sky" (†).

National Twin, B'way at 44th. (869-0950)
Theatre 1: "CB4" (†).
Theatre 2: Through April 1: "Mad Dog and Glory" (†). From April 2: "Cop and a Half" (†).

REVIVAL HOUSES

Film Forum 2, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
Through April 1: "The Queen" (1968, directed by Frank Simon), a film of a transvestite pageant.
From April 2: "Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography" (†).

Theatre 80 St. Marks, 80 St. Marks Pl. (254-7400)
March 31: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese), with Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel; and "The King of Comedy" (1983, Scorsese), with De Niro and Jerry Lewis.
April 1: "The Dead" (1987, John Huston), with Anjelica Huston and Donal McCann; and "Ulysses" (1967, Joseph Strick).
April 2-3: "Diva" (1981, Jean-Jacques Beineix; in French); and "King of Hearts" (1967, Philippe de Broca; in French and English), with Alan Bates and Geneviève Bujold.
April 4: "The Decameron" (1971, Pier Paolo

Pasolini; in Italian); and "The Canterbury Tales" (1972, Pasolini; in Italian).

April 5: "Jean de Florette" (1985, Claude Berri; in French), with Yves Montand, Gérard Depardieu, Elisabeth Depardieu, and Daniel Auteuil; and "Manon of the Spring" (1987, Berri; in French), with Montand, Auteuil, and Emmanuelle Béart.

April 6: "The Rose Tattoo" (1955, Daniel Mann), with Anna Magnani and Burt Lancaster; and "The Fugitive Kind" (1960, Sidney Lumet), with Marlon Brando, Magnani, and Joanne Woodward.

FILM LIBRARIES, ETC.

Film Society of Lincoln Center (at MOMA)—An international festival of new films by new directors. March 31 at 6 and April 3 at noon: "Night Dance" (Aleko Tsabadze, Georgia and Germany).... ¶ March 31 at 9: "Cows" (Julio Medem, Spain).... ¶ April 1 at 6 and April 3 at 9: "A Night in Versailles" (Bruno Podalydès, France) and "Another Girl, Another Planet" (Michael Almereyda, United States).... ¶ April 1 at 9 and April 4 at 3: "Ingalo" (Asdis Thoroddsen, Iceland).... ¶ April 2 at 6 and April 4 at 6: "Manhattan by Numbers" (Amir Naderi, United States).... ¶ April 2 at 9 and April 3 at 3: "The Genius" (Joe Gibbons and Emily Breer, United States).... ¶ April 3 at 6 and April 4 at 9: "Sunday's Children" (Daniel Bergman, Sweden). (11 W. 53rd St. For information, call 875-5610.)

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—April 5 at 2:30: "Sabrina" (1954, Billy Wilder), with Humphrey Bogart, Audrey Hepburn, and William Holden.... ¶ April 5 at 6: "Love in the Afternoon" (1957, Wilder), with Gary Cooper, Hepburn, and Maurice Chevalier.... ¶ April 6 at 2:30: "Secret People" (†).... ¶ April 6 at 3: "Dreams That Money Can Buy" (1948, Hans Richter).... ¶ April 6 at 6: "Roman Holiday" (1953, William Wyler), with Hepburn and Gregory Peck.... ¶ April 6 at 6: "The Seashell and the Clergyman" (1928, Germaine Dulac; a French silent film); and "Un Chien Andalou" (1928, Luis Buñuel).

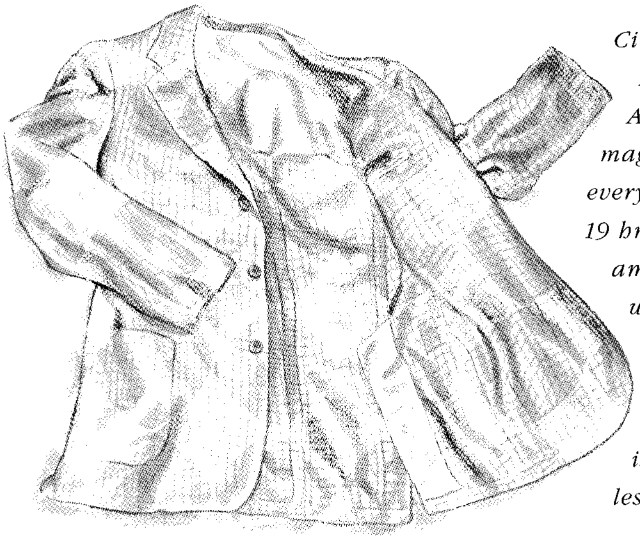
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level. (875-5600)—March 31 at 2 and 4, April 1 at 2, 4, 6, 7:45, and 9, and April 2 at 2 and 4: "Oedipus Rex" (1993, Julie Taymor).... ¶ April 2 at 8 and April 6 at 6:30 and 9: "Guelwaar" (1992, Ousmane Sembène).... ¶ April 3 at 4 and 8: "Samba Traore" (1992, Idrissa Ouedraogo).... ¶ April 3 at 6 and 10 and April 4 at 6:15: "Gito the Ungrateful" (1992, Léonce Ngabo).... ¶ April 4 at 4 and April 5 at 4:15 and 8:45: "Ta Dona" (1991, Adama Drabo).... ¶ April 4 at 8:30 and April 5 at 2 and 6:30: "Toubab Bi" (1991, Moussa Touré).... ¶ April 6 at 2: "Black Girl" (1969, Sembène).... ¶ April 6 at 4:15: "Mandabi" (1969, Sembène).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—March 31 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9:30: "The Train" (see page 30).

Symphony Space, B'way at 95th St. (864-5400)—April 6 at 7:30: "Un Chant d'Amour" (1950, Jean Genet; a French silent film); and "Andy Warhol Presents Flesh" (1968, Paul Morrissey), with Joe Dallesandro.

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria. (1-718 784-0077)—"Masters of Cinematography: A Haskell Wexler Retrospective." April 3 at 2: "The Savage Eye" (1959, Ben Maddow, Sidney Meyers, and Joseph Strick).... ¶ April 3 at 3:30: "America America" (1963, Elia Kazan).... ¶ April 4 at 2: "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" (1966, Mike Nichols), with Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, George Segal, and Sandy Dennis.... ¶ April 4 at 4:30: "In the Heat of the Night" (†).

Whitney Museum, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-0537)—Films in the 1993 Biennial Exhibition. "Daughters of the Dust" (1991, Julie Dash). Showings Wednesdays and Fridays at 3, Thursdays at 3 and 5:45, and Saturdays and Sundays at 1 and 3:30.



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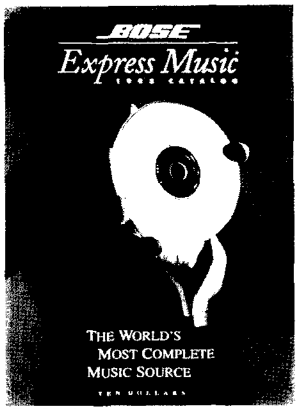

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MOVIES IN BRIEF

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Underground Railroad

JOHN FRANKENHEIMER'S elegant, agitating 1965 thriller, "The Train" (playing March 31, at Florence Gould Hall), is about a Nazi colonel's determination to transport Gallic art treasures to Germany and the French underground's crusade to foil him. Led by a railroad inspector named Labiche (Burt Lancaster), Resistance workers do their best to delay a train filled with "the glory of France"—masterpieces by Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, and so on—until the Allies can overtake it. Their efforts enrage the villainous colonel (Paul Scofield) and gall the rest of the Germans, who consider it de rigueur to have the railroad run on time, especially with their enemies just miles away from liberating Paris. When the French execute a ten-minute delay to accommodate an Allied air raid, it's a daring act of sabotage—and a bit of a deadpan joke. Every so often, Frankenheimer raises the issue of whether saving paintings is worth losing lives, then tables it. That moral riddle colors the whole surprising saga. Even the action doubles back on itself: in the most virtuosic sequence, the Resistance arranges for the train to go in a circle. Filmed in burnished black-and-white, the movie celebrates the kinetic power of the locomotives and of Lancaster in his acrobatic prime—scaling hills and walls, hopping engines and fences. Tempered by ambivalence, it's a grand show of force.

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael, Anthony Lane, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow.)

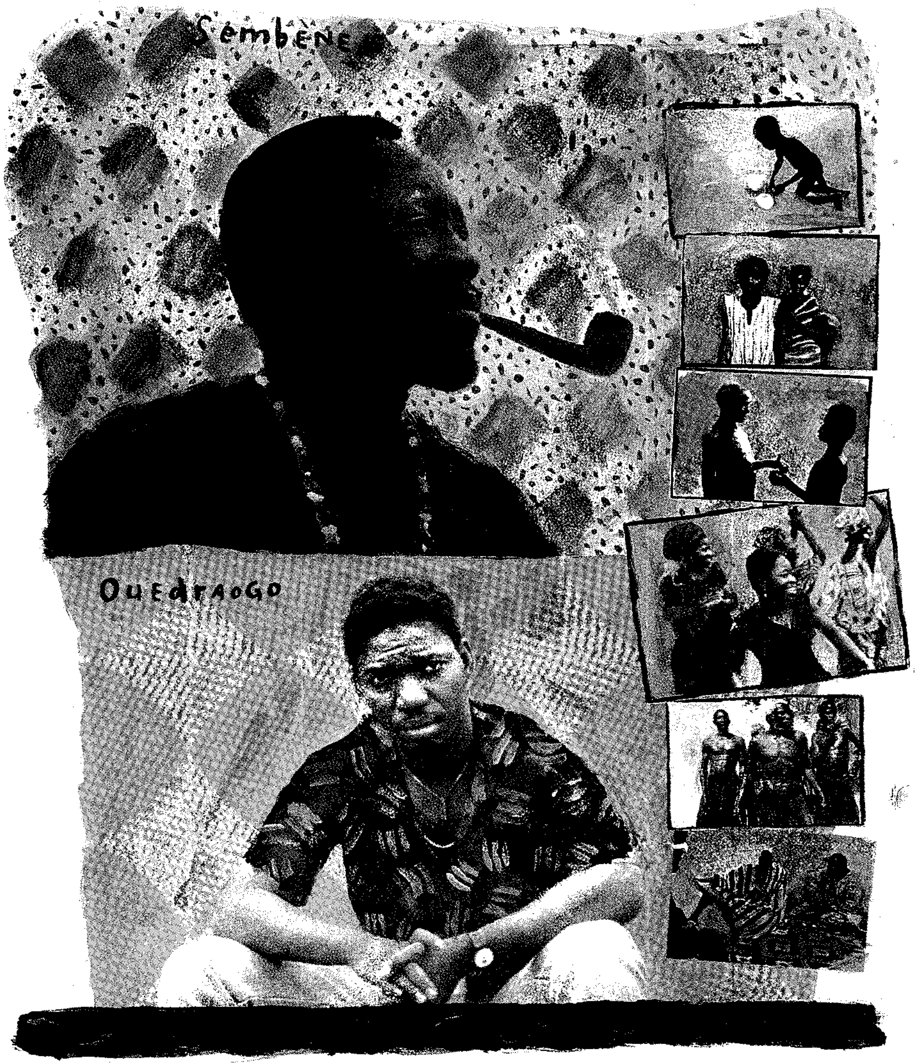
CB4—At first, this hit-or-miss, baggy-pants parody takes the form of a documentary-in-the-making about a trio of "gangsta rappers" led by scrawny Chris Rock. These three mild suburban guys strike it rich only after Rock assumes the identity of a jailed racketeer and dubs his group CB4 (for Cellblock Four). Don't expect "This Is Spinal Rap." The documentary concept peters out and the film becomes a frantic farrago: the real crime boss (Charlie Murphy, Eddie's brother) struggles to get back his identity, and a publicity-craving Reaganite politician (Phil Hartman) condemns CB4 as a corrupting force. The director, Tamra Davis, graduated from music videos, and the writers include "Saturday Night Live" regular Rock, black-culture journalist Nelson George, and Robert LoCash. Their inside job doesn't have enough good inside jokes. From its two-faced burlesque of baby-macho sexuality to its depiction of pampered kids (black and white) as gangsta fans, the picture tells you everything you already knew about rap (and didn't have to ask). With Allen Payne and Deezer D. as Rock's co-rappers, Chris Elliott as A. White (the "rapumentary" director), and Khandi Alexander as a groupie.—M.S. (Murray Hill Cinemas, Manhattan Twin, 86th Street East Twin, Waverly, 23rd St. West Triplex, Olympia, and National Twin.)

COP AND A HALF—With Burt Reynolds and Norman D. Golden II, directed by Henry Winkler. (See illustration on page 26.) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Regency, and National Twin; starting April 2.)

THE CRYING GAME—This amazing new movie by the Irish writer and director Neil Jordan ("Mona Lisa," "The Miracle") has the sure grip and the unstoppable momentum of a dream. Jordan tells the story of Fergus (Stephen Rea), a troubled I.R.A. gunman who undergoes a thorough emotional metamorphosis, and he makes the hero's change of heart moving and persuasive; the film inspires an irrational sort of trust, a willing suspension of something deeper and more fundamental than disbelief. The script is full of reversals and abrupt dislocations and, halfway through, the movie springs a huge, jaw-dropping surprise. Disorienting us isn't the ultimate aim of Jordan's artistic strategy, though; he jars us out of our accustomed responses to prepare us for the purer, more penetrating ones he really wants from us. The picture is a splendid entertainment—an elating, charmed sprint through all sorts of contemporary terrors. Also with Forest Whitaker, Miranda Richardson, Jim Broadbent, Adrian Dunbar, and a newcomer named Jaye Davidson, who is astonishing.—T.R. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/16/92.) (Angelika Film Center, Sutton, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Criterion Center.)

ETHAN FROME—Edith Wharton's novel was published in 1911, and it has taken a long time to reach the screen. Not long enough, though. John Madden's version, written by Richard Nelson, is a dull and dutiful affair; there's no reason that a movie should stay faithful to a text, but in this case the adaptation has taken everything that's woeful and wintry about the book and left behind the excitement—all the taut sexual restraint, and the headlong deathwish of the final sled-ride. Liam Neeson plays Ethan, with Joan Allen as his shrewish wife, Zeena, and Patricia Arquette as Mattie Silver, who tempts him into tragedy. Of these, only Neeson grips your attention; he lumbers through the film like a suffering Samson—somewhere in there you can see the ghost of old power and passion. You have to go back to Boris Karloff to discover a similar blend of brutishness and delicacy. If only the rest of the movie could pitch itself up to Neeson's level; this is cinema on its best behavior, guaranteed to wear you down. Back to the book.—A.L. (3/29/93) (Tower East, and Quad Cinemas.)

A FAR OFF PLACE—Critically drubbed as too bloody for a Walt Disney picture, this loose adaptation of two Laurens van der Post novels ("A Story Like the Wind" and "A Far Off



At the Walter Reade Theatre, films by African directors Ousmane Sembène and Idrissa Ouedraogo.

GERARD NICOLAS

Place") is actually one of Disney's better live-action adventures—for sixth graders and up. The director, Mikael Salomon, brings a former cinematographer's visual flair to the saga of brutally orphaned teen-age friends (Reese Witherspoon and Ethan Randall) fleeing for their lives across the Kalahari Desert with the aid of a sagacious Bushman (Sarel Bok) and a loyal Rhodesian ridgeback. The bad guys are ivory poachers. The film has some of the pop appeal of Tarzan movies—there's a great shot of an elephant herd helping the heroes by covering their tracks. Randall's coddled American and Witherspoon's hardy African-bred girl go through the usual joke-filled dance of opposites attracting, but every now and then Bok's Bushman does something unforgettable—like pressing all his fingertips against those of a pal in a delicate gesture of solidarity. Robert Caswell, Jonathan Hensleigh, and Sally Robinson did the script; Juan Ruiz-Anchia was the director of photography.—M.S. (Guild; through April 1.)

Fire in the Sky—Who is the U.F.O. abductee Travis Walton? As portrayed in this big-screen docudrama, he could have walked out of the Monty Python song that goes "He's a lumberjack and he's O.K." The screenwriter, Tracy Tormé, characterizes Travis (D. B. Sweeney) as a dreamer among loggers—when a timber crew confronts an alien spacecraft in a northeastern-Arizona forest, Travis dances into the light and gets space-jacked. Only a fraction of the movie sketches Travis's ordeal with the extraterrestrials. Most of it chronicles what happens when he disappears for five days and the townsfolk suspect his co-workers of foul play. It's a yokel version of "An Enemy of the People" capped by an alien primal scene: flat-faced creatures examining Travis with instruments as fearsome and baroque as those of the mad doctors in "Dead Ringers." The overqualified cast includes Robert Patrick, James Garner, and Kathleen Wilhoite. Craig Sheffer, the bad boy in the bunch, wins the heartiest viewer response by expressing contempt for the American Gothic milieu. Robert Lieberman directed.—M.S. (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, and Astor Plaza.)

Groundhog Day—An above-average Bill Murray vehicle, directed by Harold Ramis from a script by Ramis and Danny Rubin. The star plays Phil Connors, a burned-out TV weatherman who wakes up one morning to discover that he's stuck in time—condemned to relive, endlessly, Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. The picture goes on a little too long, but Murray's inventiveness keeps it lively even during its less inspired stretches. The fundamental, deliberate monotony of the conception actually serves to highlight his skill at comic riffing. The movie feels like a spontaneous one-man jam session, and you sense that Murray can play all night, just for the fun of finding out what else he might come up with. He fools around as if there were no tomorrow. Also with Andie MacDowell, Chris Elliott, and Stephen Tobolowsky.—T.R. (2/22/93) (Village Theatre VII, First & 62nd Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Worldwide Cinemas, and 84th Street Sixplex. . . . ¶ Park & 86th Street Cinemas; through April 1.)

In the Heat of the Night (1967)—A comedy-thriller with Sidney Poitier as a quick-witted police officer from the North and Rod Steiger as a blundering Southern chief of police. Fast and enjoyable, with Poitier's color used for comedy. He's like a black Sherlock Holmes in a Tom-and-Jerry cartoon of reversals. For once it's funny (instead of embarrassing) that he's superior to everybody else. In the final joke, Steiger plays redcap to him. With Lee Grant, Warren Oates, Beah Richards, and Scott Wilson. The cinematography by Haskell Wexler has an exciting, alive quality, and the good Quincy Jones score includes a title song sung by Ray Charles. Directed by Norman Jewison, from a script by Stirling Silliphant based on a novel by John Ball.—P.K. (American Museum of the Moving Image; April 4.)

Jack the Bear—With Danny DeVito, directed by Marshall Herskovitz. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 34th St. East, Gotham Cinema, Chelsea Cinemas, and Carnegie Hall Cinemas; starting April 2.)

Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.—The heroine of Leslie Harris's début feature is a black inner-city teen-ager named Chantel (Ariyan Johnson), and the film means to demonstrate that kids like her can't be reduced to a stereotype. For maybe the first three minutes, you feel the thrill of anticipation, a sense that you're about to get an entirely fresh perspective on urban experience. But after the opening sequence, which is edited to the hip-hop rhythm of a number by the female rappers Nikki D and Cee Asia, the movie starts to go wrong. As a storyteller, Harris moves to the beat of the same old drummer which usually sets the tempo for earnest low-budget independent movies; she leads the heroine, and the audience, on a forced march from lesson to lesson. Chantel is less a person than a counter-stereotype, and Harris uses her according to the didactic need of the moment. Sometimes Chantel is a positive-image icon, sometimes a cautionary figure; she's always a statement of some sort. The filmmaker's eye for the nuances of behavior isn't sharp, and scene after scene is ruined by faulty observation; Harris is in such a hurry to get through the lesson plan that she garbles messages that shouldn't be difficult to put across clearly and forcefully. (The messages that do come through aren't always welcome; a classroom sequence in which Chantel argues with her Jewish history teacher is unmistakably anti-Semitic.)—T.R. (3/22/93) (Village Theatre VII, Orpheum VII, and Criterion Center.)

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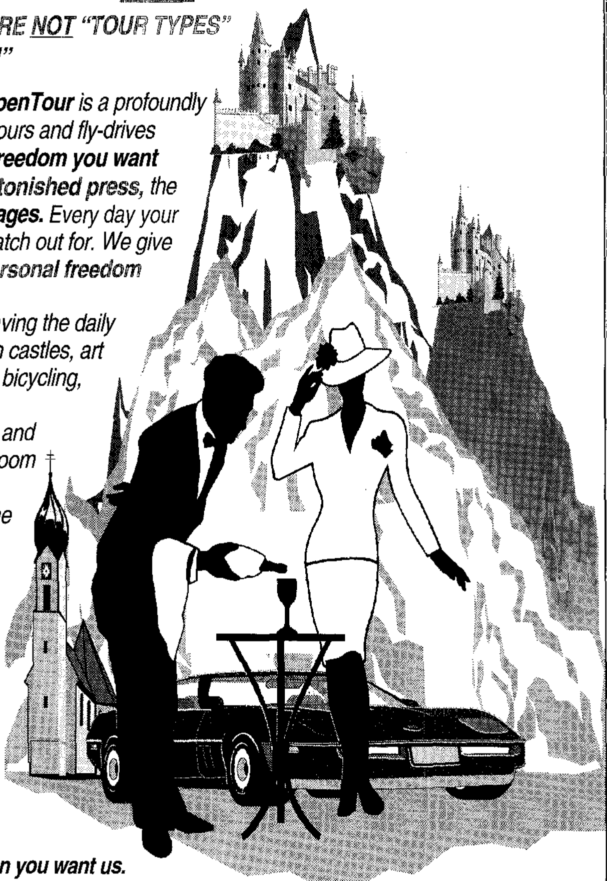

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IN BRIEF-Cont'd

The Last Days of Chez Nous—In a ramshackle Sydney household, an Australian family gets on with its life, but only just. Beth (Lisa Harrow) starts to lose her French husband, J.P. (Bruno Ganz), to the attentions of her sister Vicki (Kerry Fox); meanwhile, her daughter Annie (Miranda Otto) is falling quietly for Tim (Kiri Paramore), their lodger with the crewcut and the sense of humor. Gillian Armstrong's new movie is a worthy successor to "My Brilliant Career" and "High Tide"; if anything, it feels even more mobile, charting every shift in the emotional climate. It's hard to pin down just what kind of work it is: jokes at the dinner table can turn nasty and upsetting, but people also recover quickly, and sometimes dance without warning. It's a true ensemble movie: none of the performances are vain or showy—Harrow in particular braves all manner of self-exposure, so we can see the fear beneath her strength. This fluent, hopeful comedy (and it is a comedy, for all the encroachments of sadness) is Armstrong's best movie to date.—A.L. (3/1/93) (Village East Cinemas, and 68th St. Playhouse.)

At Theatre 80 St. Marks, Burt Lancaster and Anna Magnani in "The Rose Tattoo."

MICHAELE VOLLBRACH

Mad Dog and Glory—A strange and unsuccessful brew stirred up by screenwriter Richard Price and director John McNaughton. Love comes to a lonely cop called Wayne (Robert De Niro) when he saves the life of a Mafia smoothy (Bill Murray), who offers him a week's worth of Glory (Uma Thurman) by way of reward. Unlikely plots can be fun, but only if everybody is prepared to pitch in; this one feels graceless and trumped-up, and not even the spirited efforts of Bill Murray can kick it into life. De Niro seems to be putting on a show rather than lighting his character up from the inside, although he does have a couple of convincing scenes with Uma Thurman; moviegoers may have forgotten just how nervy and maladroit screen lovers can be.—A.L. (3/15/93) (Coronet, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, and Metro Cinema, ... ¶ 34th St. East, Art Greenwich Twin, and National Twin; through April 1.)

El Mariachi—This first film by twenty-four-year-old Robert Rodriguez was made for seven thousand dollars, and part of its enormous charm is that it really looks like a seven-thousand-dollar movie. It's a grubby little thriller, set in a Mexican border town, about a wandering mariachi musician (Carlos Gallardo) who is mistaken for a killer. The picture is a virtually unbroken series of chases and shoot-outs, and the non-stop action should be tiresome, but it isn't. Rodriguez establishes a delirious pace, and keeps the bullets flying and the corpses crumpling for a brisk, and appropriately terse, eighty-two minutes. The movie has the sort of dry, bracingly unwholesome humor that relentless mayhem can produce if the characters are mean and abject enough and the storytelling is speedy and laconic. This young filmmaker is no visual wizard; he's just an energetic and imaginative manipulator of tried-and-true genre conventions. But if you enter his seedy world with expectations as low as the picture's aspirations, you'll probably have a very good time. Also with Reinol Martinez, Consuelo Gómez, and Peter Marquardt. In Spanish.—T.R. (2/22/93) (Village Theatre VII, and Angelika 57.)

Scent of a Woman—Director Martin Brest and screenwriter Bo Goldman labor mightily to design a holiday-season heart-warmer about a middle-aged blind man and a troubled teenager (Chris O'Donnell), but fortunately their low intentions are undone by the star, Al Pacino, whose performance taps emotions too complex and too frightening to be resolved by the simple moral victory that ends the picture. His Frank Slade, a retired Army officer and former aide to L.B.J., is a bitter, misanthropic, profoundly depressed man, and the actor makes us feel the full weight of the character's hopelessness. This is acting that chills the heart beyond any possibility of warming. The filmmakers may dismiss the audience with a banal lesson written on the blackboard—"Smell the roses" is the gist—but by the end we're not paying much attention. We're still sorting out the ambiguities and uncomfortable truths that Pacino's great performance has let us in on.—T.R. (12/28/92-1/4/93) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . ¶ Regency; through April 1.)

Secret People (1951)—The use of violence for idealistic purposes is the theme of this English suspense film. Valentina Cortese plays a refugee from totalitarianism who becomes involved in an underground movement in London; her revulsion and guilt when she employs brutal methods are contrasted with the attitude of her lover (Sergei Reggiani), a hardened revolutionary. With the very young Audrey Hepburn in a sizable role (it's rather like seeing Cinderella before the transformation), and Irene Worth, Athene Seyler, Charles Goldner, and Megs Jenkins. The expressive camera movements and the editing techniques of the director, Thorold Dickinson, were much discussed at the time, yet the film isn't very gripping. Written by Dickinson and Wolfgang Wilhelm.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; April 6.)

Stolen Children ("Il Ladro di Bambini")—Neo-neorealism about a decent young officer in the Carabinieri (Enrico Lo Verso) and his attempt to connect with two troubled kids: an eleven-year-old girl (Valentina Scalici) whose mother turned her into a prostitute, and her sickly younger brother (Giuseppe Ieracitano). The quest to find a place for the siblings takes them all the way from the outskirts of Milan to Sicily, and becomes what used to be called "a journey of understanding." The officer strives to reawaken the kids' innocence but finds that he's as much a prisoner of institutions as they are. The director, Gianni Amelio (who co-wrote the script with Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli) is honorable and sensitive; the movie has some tense, emotionally saturated moments, such as when the girl remarks to the officer that she used to receive compliments for her "lovely mouth." But the odyssey is a bit drawn-out and flat. The film lacks the heightened lucidity of its major models—the movies of Vittorio De Sica. Basically, you see three withdrawn people warming to each other between naps. In Italian.—M.S. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Strictly Ballroom—Baz Luhrmann's first film brings good news: Australian cinema is on the move again, with a vigor not seen since the days of "Mad Max." There's no violence in "Strictly Ballroom"—the general lack of unpleasantness, in fact, is quite unnerving—but the speed of it still leaves you reeling. A young dancer, played by Paul Mercurio, acquires a new partner (Tara Morice), dreams up a flash routine, and sets out to break the Old Guard. The plot is cut-rate melodrama, and Luhrmann knows it; but he never sneers at his hero's ambitions. Besides, there are so many other things to laugh at—the costumes, the minor characters with their major obsessions, the psychedelic makeup, the trashy music. The movie is over before you know it, and is not one to linger in the mind, or indeed pass through the mind at all; but it's a good-humored ride for the senses, never too sickly, and who can say no to that?—A.L. (2/15/93) (Angelika Film Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Unforgiven—Set in eighteen-eighties Kansas and Wyoming, this engrossing, moody Western is the sixteenth film Clint Eastwood has directed, and by far the best. The canny script, by David Webb Peoples, revives the old story about the retired gunfighter (Eastwood) who picks up his firearms again for one last score. But there's no easy resolution, and the movie is stronger because of its loose ends: the filmmakers acknowledge that the bloody chaos of an outlaw's life can't be settled in two hours and eleven minutes. The action begins when a cowboy slashes the face of a prostitute, and her co-workers pool their money to offer a reward for the murder of him and his partner. Jaimz Woolvett is the upstart who enlists Eastwood in the bounty hunt. Morgan Freeman plays Eastwood's longtime partner, Gene Hackman a megalomaniac sheriff, Richard Harris a flamboyant English gunslinger, and Saul Rubinek a dime novelist. This is the finest set of performances ever to grace a Clint Eastwood movie, and this time Eastwood even does a good job directing Eastwood. Every bullet in this movie matters; under its leathery hide is a genuine compulsion to de-romanticize Western gunfighting.—M.S. (8/10/92) (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Columbus Circle.)

Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography—A documentary, directed by Arnold Glassman, Todd McCarthy, and Stuart Samuels. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Film Forum 2; starting April 2.)

Watch It—The title of Tom Flynn's movie sounds like a publicity come-on; in fact it refers to a game played by the central characters who met at college and still share a house in Chicago. As played by Jon Tenney, John C. McGinley, and Tom Sizemore, they begin as frivolous, womanizing jocks, and "Watch It"—in which they plague each other with complex practical jokes—is the high point of their existence. They may be fun-loving, but Flynn's movie is anything but; it looks drab and shoddy, and tends to flatten what it should be hyping up. Even the gags, rather endearing at first, turn serious when soulful and sensitive John (Peter Gallagher) joins the household and transforms the mood; from then on, the guys start to fall in love and—you guessed it—learn about themselves. "Watch It" promises high spirits but never delivers them; by the end, it feels lazy and slumped. If anything keeps it alive, it's a couple of performances by women, a combative Cynthia Stevenson and a daffy Lili Taylor.—A.L. (3/29/93) (19th Street East 6, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Orpheum VII.)

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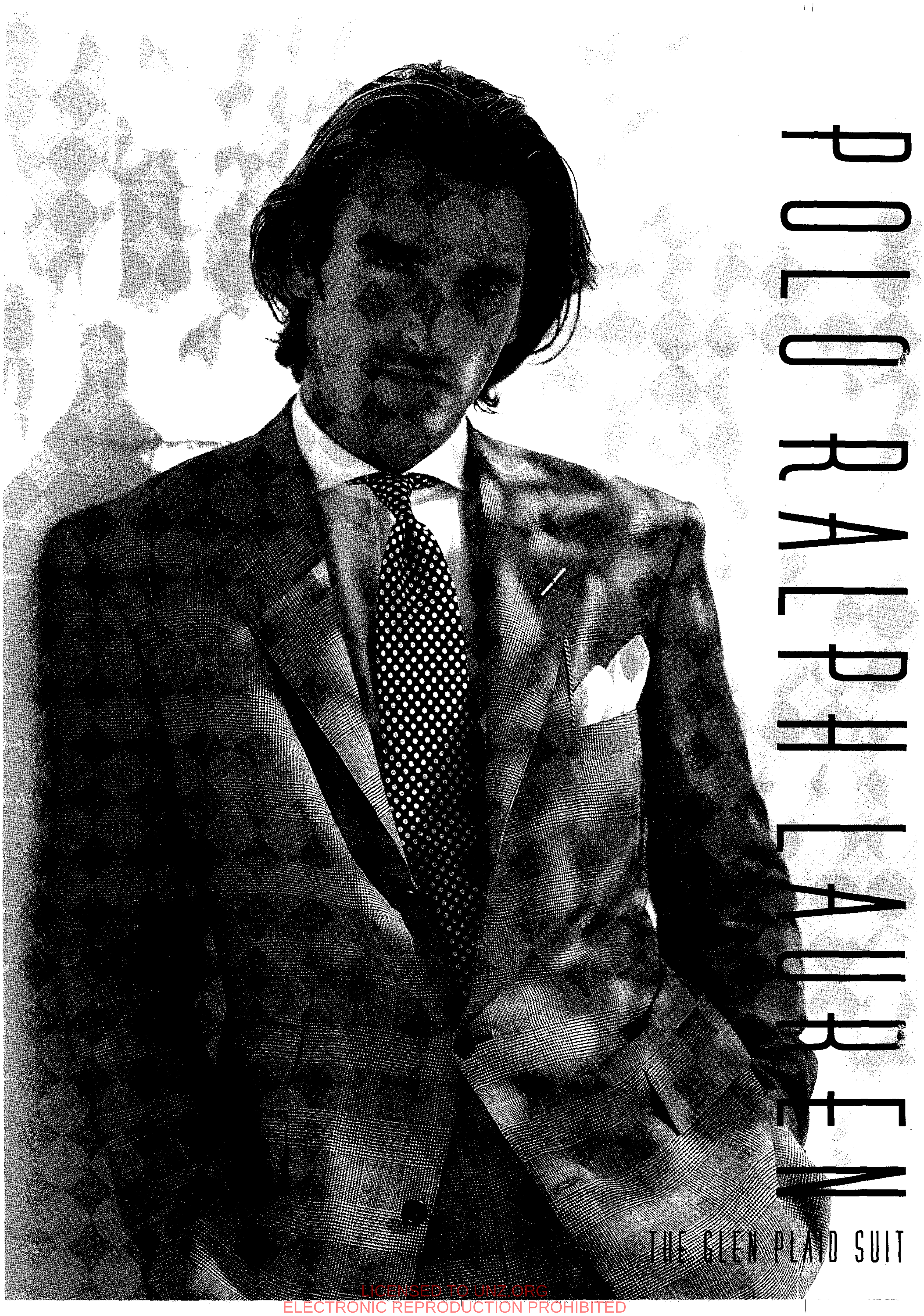
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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

NOT THE OSCARS

THIS is the season for awards ceremonies in Manhattan, as elsewhere, and last week the city's lounge singers had their turn under the lights. The Manhattan Association of Cabarets & Clubs held its annual MAC awards in Symphony Space, on Broadway in the Nineties, and almost a thousand people showed up. The curtain was supposed to rise at 8 P.M., but long before that taxis were pulling up in the slush outside, disgorging hectic press agents, extravagantly gowned divas of various sexes, and shining young men in tuxedos. For an hour or more, they roiled around in a happy crush, smoking long cigarettes and yelling ecstatic hellos.

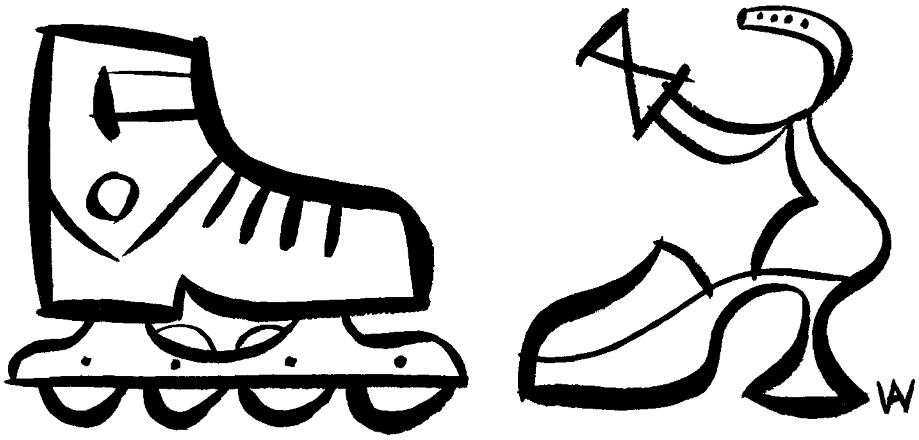
A few fans pushed in for autographs, but mostly the cabaret people were pushing each other. It was a close, heady scene, and Andrew Martin, the editor of the magazine *Cab*, expounded on it briefly before setting off into the crowd. "In a nutshell, what this is is the Tony awards of cabaret!" he cried. A narrow-faced man with popping eyes, he wore wide horn-rimmed glasses and was buried in a huge herringbone-tweed coat. He said one of his favorite singers of all time was Rosemary Clooney, but when he was asked about Harry Connick, Jr., he demurred. "I knew Harry when he was still Harry," he said, with an elaborate wave of a hand. "When he was down at the Knickerbocker."

Harry Connick, Jr., the smooth, lizardlike crooner from New Orleans, has moved on to bigger rooms, of course, and his success has invigorated the profession. He was a real cabaret singer once, playing places like the Knickerbocker and the Algonquin. Talent still incubates in the old-style clubs, which barely exist anywhere outside the city, but the genre is less focussed now. There were comedy duos up for awards last week, and also magicians, movie-star impersonators, and a gaggle of drag queens.

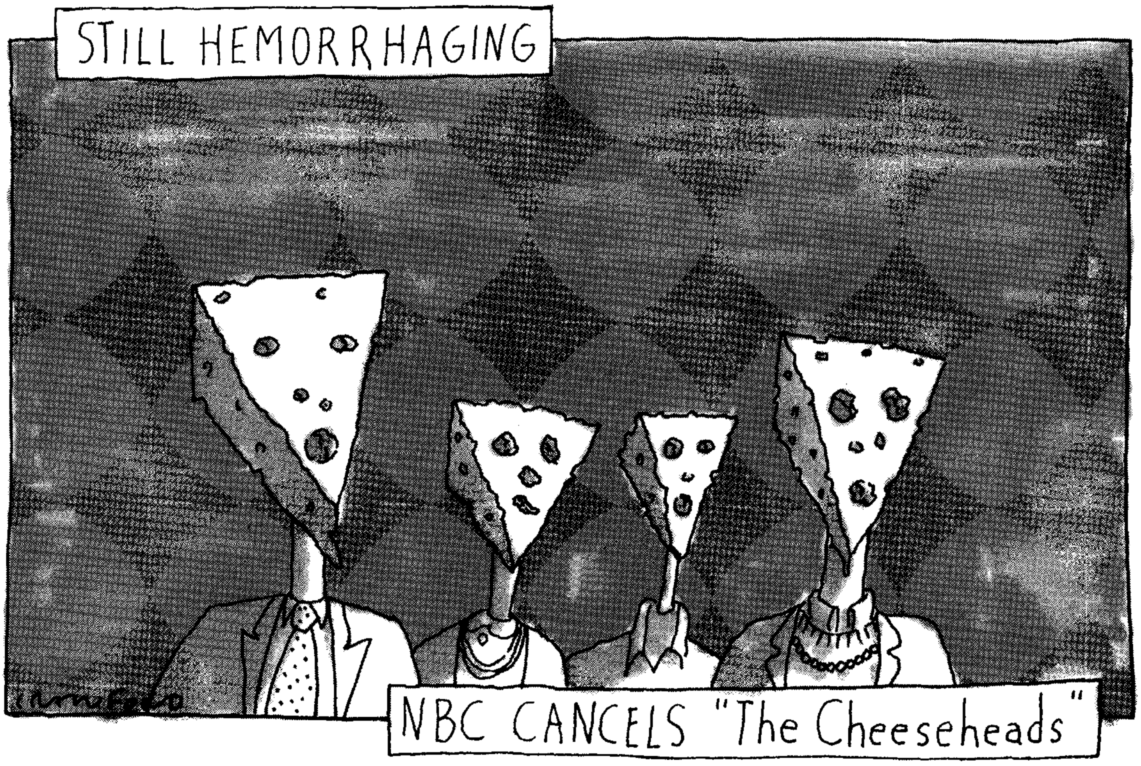
The dingy balconies around the long, sloping hall were completely filled by eight-fifteen, and when the lights went down, at eight-twenty, a big cheer rose up from the plush felt seats in front. The MACs were put together ten years ago by a genial club owner named Erv Raible, who taught art in Cincinnati before moving East. Now, after an intricate opening production number (it involved lots of singers on telephones), Erv came onstage. A natty character, wearing a trim mustache and a dull-black tuxedo, he told the cheering crowd, "Cabaret doesn't produce chorus people. We produce stars!"

The MAC isn't a statue, and it isn't made of gold. It's a plaque, really—white paper with black lettering, on black lacquered wood, like a diploma in a dentist's office. The winners—there were thirty-nine of them—didn't grab at it, the way high-gloss entertainers sometimes do, and not many people had written acceptance speeches, but the recipients all looked proud. Few of them thanked their agents, but lots of them remembered old friends who had died. A drag queen named Ruby Rims (Outstanding Impersonator / Impressionist) came onstage wearing a tangle of synthetic hair and a flowing gown laced with pink boa feathers. "I dedicate this award to my dad," he said.

Performers milled around at the back of the theatre while some of the winners had their pictures taken in a side hall, near a wooden telephone booth. Eartha Kitt was backstage, and so was the great club singer Margaret Whiting. Ms. Whiting wore a touch of red lipstick, and looped golden earrings, and her white hair was pinned up in a chic pile. "Cabaret started in France, and then it picked up in Germany between the wars," she explained. "The word means 'tavern' in French, because that was the venue, of course. New York cabaret's having its third renaissance now, and a good thing. It's the most delicious of art forms. You have to



ANDERS WENNGREN



be yourself in cabaret, one to one."

As the show progressed, people came and went in the dark, clutching their furs. A female impersonator named Beverly Hills performed a song called "This Is My Life," then loitered at the back of the theatre, chatting with friends. He said he was born Bobby Pearce, in Miami, Florida. He was dressed in a short, sequinned mackerel-colored gown, and had coils of red hair heaped up on his head, but he looked round and almost courtly in this incredible outfit. "What's cabaret to me?" he said. "I feel it should be a night of laughing and fun. People gather in a room; maybe they have a drink. They can just sit there and laugh, forget their troubles."

The award show lasted past midnight, but then cabaret people play late and are used to that. Ann Hampton Callaway, who has won seven MACs, sang some Cole Porter lyrics to her own music. Beverly Hills lost out, in a category called Characterization, to an elegantly demented redhead called Miss Coco. Eartha Kitt presented two awards and looked sultry in a black-and-brown dress with an ermine collar. And Craig Carnelia, who won a MAC for his song "Flight," bounded onto the stage in absolute glee. He paused for a moment, cradling his MAC, and called out to the dwindling crowd, "Thank you! I really wanted this!"

HORSEPLAY

MANY people may regard the line of carriage horses outside the Plaza as a pleasant anachronism, but in fact they are the center of one of New York's longest and bitterest political feuds. Everything about the carriage horses is controversial.

"All the horses' heads droop," Peggy Parker, the leader of the anti-carriage-horse Carriage Horse Action Committee, says. "It just shows how miserable and unhappy they are." Cornelius Patrick Byrne, the proprietor of a twelve-horse stable on West Thirty-seventh Street, points to a gray mare named Carousel and says, "Of course her head droops. That means she's a calm horse. A high head means high-strung. We look for what we call a cold-blooded horse, with the head down. We *like* droopy heads."

Robert Boyle, a driver, said his livelihood was at stake. Since arriving in New York from County Leitrim, Ireland, seven and a half years ago, Mr. Boyle has started at least five, and often seven, days of the week the same way. "I live in Woodside, Queens, and try to get to the stable, on West Thirty-eighth, at about nine," he said the other day. "Then I go to Bruno, clean him up, and groom him down. You get attached to your horse, and I've been with Bruno for about three years. He needs a lot of attention. Look at him stamping his foot there. That's because I'm not talking to him."

Mr. Boyle was standing by his carriage in front of the Plaza. "Here it is nearly two in the afternoon," he said, "and I haven't broken yet. There are twenty cabs out here, and I bet half of them haven't broken." This is carriage-driver jargon. It means "breaking the ice" with the first fare of the day. "We have to be off the streets at four, so two rides would be a good day for me. I have to work construction part-time now. You can't make a living this way. We're just hanging on for November and the chance to get our livelihood back."

What Mr. Boyle is waiting for is November 21st, when the city's four-year-old statute regulating horse carriages expires. While this law brought one benefit to drivers—it allowed them to double the basic half-hour fare, to thirty-four dollars—it imposed damaging restrictions on them, forbidding them to work between the hours of 4 P.M. and 7 P.M. and essentially confining them to Central Park South and the Park itself. The friends and enemies of the carriage business are now preparing for battle over whether the law should be retained, revised, or simply allowed to expire. At risk is a New York tradition dating from 1869, when horse carriages were introduced as a lower-cost alternative to the stagecoaches that had previously ferried customers around the city. Today, there are sixty-eight carriages in the city and about a hundred and forty carriage horses, living in five stables around Manhattan.

"Four to seven was our busiest part of the day," Mr. Boyle said. "As much as forty per cent of our business used to be from New Yorkers. A guy would have us pick up his girlfriend after work at her office—stuff like that. Now we can't do that anymore. Tourists would come by and have us drive them around for an hour before the theatre. That's gone, too.”

Mr. Byrne, the stable owner, says, “The bill has cut our revenues by two-thirds at the least. And look at how they regulate us, more than any other industry in the city. You have to get separate licenses from Consumer Affairs for the drivers and the carriages. Then, you have to get separate permits from the Health Department for the horses and the stables. And then the Health Department inspects the stables once a month—and it inspects certain restaurants once every five years.”

What irks Mr. Byrne the most, however, is the curious role played in the horse-carriage industry by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The A.S.P.C.A., which was founded in 1866, combines public advocacy and law enforcement. On the one hand, it lobbies for a variety of animal-welfare causes, and, on the other, it has its own police force, whose officers, armed with guns, break up cockfights and dogfights, arrest animal abusers, and write two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar summonses to horse-carriage drivers. “The A.S.P.C.A. is a special-interest group that has been just about completely taken over by animal-rights extremists and has assumed the role of a law-enforcement agency,” Mr. Byrne says. “It enforces the law to the ultra-hilt—fines for getting to the Park five minutes early, things like that.” Mr. Byrne has carefully preserved a four-year-old A.S.P.C.A. fund-raising brochure that places “City Horse Carriage Rides” on its “10 Most Unwanted List,” after “Hot-Iron Face Branding” and “Steel-Jaw Leghold Traps.”

Roger Caras, the president of the A.S.P.C.A., says, “We write the summonses because the regular police won't do it. A city police captain would grab the goddam badges off the chests of his cops if they said they had to go to court on a ticket they wrote to a horse carriage. What the drivers really want is no one to enforce the law.”

Peggy Parker, of the Carriage Horse Action Committee, is a free-lance graphic artist. “I used to have clients in the old General Motors Building, across from

MOTHER GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

A YEAR ago at this time, I was in Los Angeles preparing to go to the Academy Awards as the date of someone who was nominated for an Oscar—my mother. The Oscars are about Hollywood, about bright, ephemeral glamour, about surfaces that reflect. My mother is not about these things. Yet there we were, an unlikely pair, preparing for our big night.

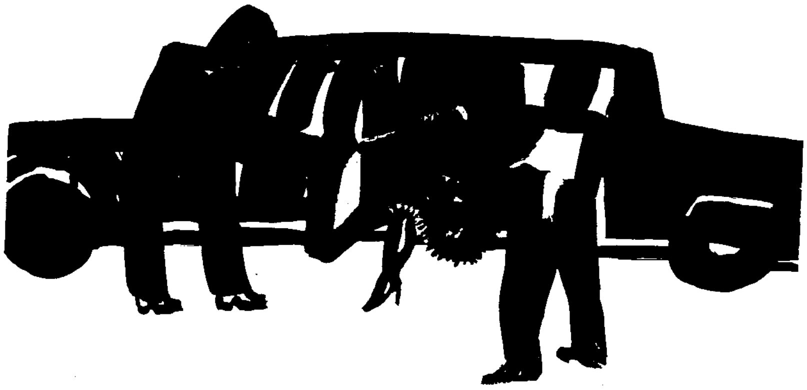
My mother had spent the previous ten years working on a documentary film entitled “The Restless Conscience,” which examined the resistance to Hitler inside Germany. Most of those years were solitary, with little in the way of financial or moral support from the world at large, and for a time my mother's commitment to the movie had overtones of Don Quixote. Suddenly, we were on a plane to Los Angeles, perusing the Coca-Cola Academy Award insert in *People*, which dutifully listed in the Best Documentary Feature category “The Restless Conscience.” To recall the tone of the previous ten years, and to contemplate the substance of the movie itself, which was not about surfaces that reflect, and to contrast that with this glossy advertisement in *People* and with what lay before us just then—all this had the effect of broadening one's sense of what is possible in the world.

The big day arrived at last. I had looked forward to the moment when we would step out of our taxi onto the red carpet at the entrance, but it never materialized, for us or for anyone else: a mile-long traffic jam of limousines provoked a kind of celebrity pilgrimage, in which shoes that were certainly not made for walking got a lengthy workout.

The entrance itself was a bit daunting. The red carpet cut through a canyon of bleachers crammed with people, all of whom seemed to have cameras. We showed our tickets and stepped forward, and all at once the cameras started to whizz and chirp. It was like listening to locusts devour a forest. My mother held my arm, and we marched solemnly down the red-carpeted aisle, as though I were giving her away at a wedding. I wondered why some generous souls were taking our picture, and then realized that the man in front of us was Kevin Costner. I held up a moment to let him get a few feet ahead, and then we went on, down through the valley of the locusts.

My mother and I entered the sight lines and the consciousness of hundreds of people. I could feel their viewfinders bearing down on us. Memories were scanned and calculations made. A second went by, maybe less, and then all those hundreds dropped their cameras to their chests simultaneously, a chorus line of disappointed fans and paparazzi.

The awards themselves were like a game show with very attractive contestants. I thought about the people in my mother's movie—their concern for ethics, their sense that actions have consequences—and how odd it was that they should in some way be here, in a



FILIP PAGOWSKI

place filled with tuxedos and chiffon dresses.

The presenters for the Best Documentary Feature category were Spike Lee and John Singleton. A tremendous surge of anxiety about my mother overtook me. But there was no time to worry, because the announcement was at hand, and, besides, in reciting the nominees John Singleton had just mispronounced our last name. It's Beller, and he said "Belyer." No big deal, I thought—the guy is under a lot of pressure, it's his first time on the Oscars, there are bigger things to worry about in the world. And yet several hundred million people had just fleetingly apprehended our last name incorrectly.

Then came the envelope. When we arrived, my mother had been disturbed by the fact that we were not on the aisle, where she thought the winners would be seated. I assured her that this wasn't the case, that only two very secretive accountants knew who had won, and that they would never do something as obvious as seat the winners where they could most conveniently get to the stage.

Now Spike fumbled with the envelope, and my mother clutched a carefully folded piece of paper—an acceptance speech that she had spent the last several days working on. She had been told that all acceptance speeches had to be under forty-five seconds, or else, and so she had devoted a great deal of time to the job of creating a text that was filled with gratitude and emotion, conveyed a message, included thanks to about twenty people, and could be delivered without any haste in less than forty-five seconds. Spike finally had the piece of paper out of the envelope, and a great hush came over the hall.

Even the most ardent Oscar enthusiasts probably don't care much about the Best Documentary Feature category; it may be the category with the lowest celebrity quotient. But I sensed a reverential silence as Spike and John Singleton prepared to announce the winner. This silence is a moment of truth that everyone recognizes; it is, I think, like a window through which you can climb for just a moment, into a place where you can pretend to be the person on the edge of his seat. In this case, pretending wasn't necessary.

"And the Oscar goes to . . . " Spike said. I glanced sidewise at my mother, whose hands were clasped over her speech. Her face was stern, almost grim. For ten years, everything that happened to this movie happened because she willed it to, yet now, of course, we had no say in the matter. The dice were in midair. Singleton read the names of the winners, and whoops and cries of joy erupted from the aisle seats at the end of our row.

The winners made their speech, and then it was time for the next category. It all seemed so odd—the importance of the event wildly magnified and simultaneously diminished by that game-show atmosphere, the big monitors, the surreal dresses. I sneaked a peek at my mother. She sat there completely still, her face impassive and without expression, or so it would have seemed to someone else. To me, there was a lot going on in that face. Her hands still held the speech. She was clutching it so hard that the piece of paper trembled a little. I didn't know quite what to do, and it was then that the man sitting on the other side of her, a documentary filmmaker named Vince DiPersio, who had now been nominated for two Oscars and been runner-up twice, turned to her quite suddenly and gave her a big kiss on the cheek. He had a beard, and I imagined the bristles of his beard touching her skin. It was as if something melted, and a more familiar expression came over her face. She turned to him, and we all laughed. At that moment, my mother's face *was* a surface that reflected, and the light surrounding her was wonderfully illuminating.

—THOMAS BELLER

the Plaza, and that's where I first saw the horrors of the horses," she said. "In the summer, the weather was so stifling and the horses smelled so bad that I had to go to a bus stop two blocks away. In hot weather, the horses' hooves sink into the pavement, which can have a temperature of two hundred degrees, and the horses are not properly watered. And in the winter they're not wearing blankets and they get cold. I could just go on and on. Anyway, there's virtually no enforcement of the regulations. The A.S.P.C.A. is a joke."

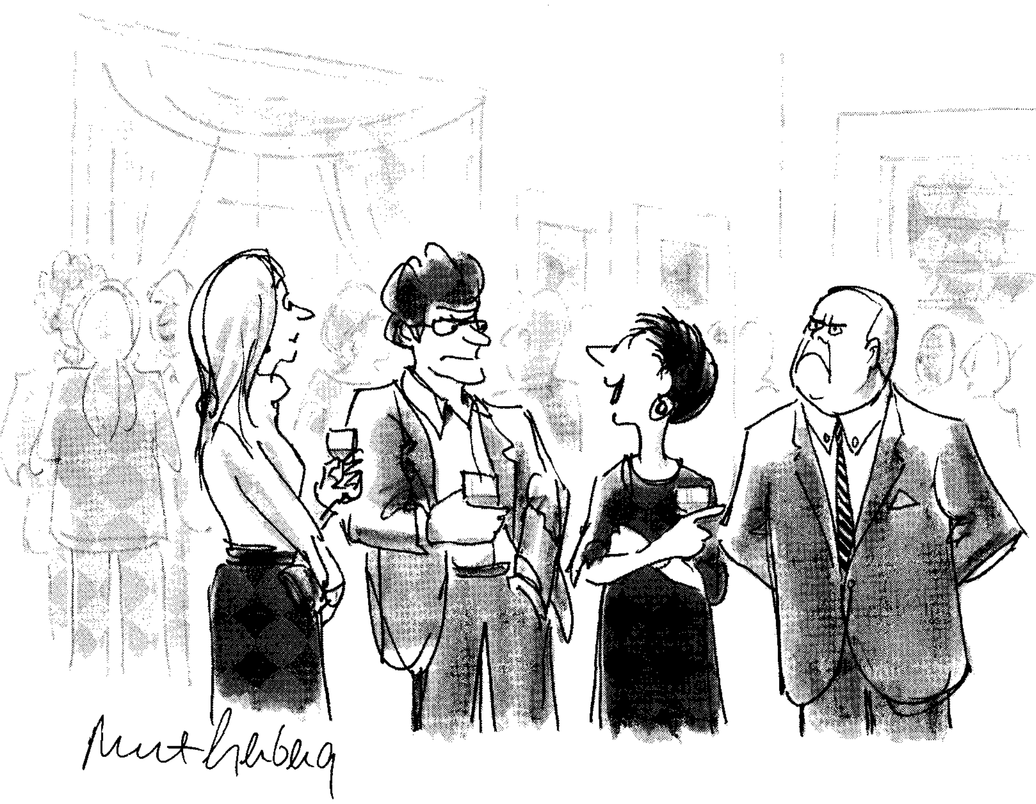
City Councilman Walter McCaffrey leads the pro-carriage forces on the City Council. His district includes Woodside, which, like the carriage industry as a whole, is heavily Irish. He says that the carriage business directly supports about three hundred jobs in the city and helps the tourist trade as well. "I could not ask for a better foil than Peggy Parker," he says. "Her testimony to the Council alone gets me four or five votes."

Positions are hardening in anticipation of the battle in November. A bill allowing the horses to pick up fares over more of Manhattan was vetoed last May by Mayor Dinkins, who is a former board member of the A.S.P.C.A. "We want the regulations kept and perhaps tightened," Mr. Caras says. Ms. Parker says, "We want the horses limited to Central Park—period." Mr. McCaffrey is hoping for a bill along the lines of the one that Mayor Dinkins vetoed. Mr. Byrne would prefer that the law expire and no new regulation take its place.

Some city officials have expressed exasperation at the amount of attention that the carriage issue attracts. City Councilwoman Ronnie Eldridge says, "All I want is that we increase the number of inspections of day-care centers to match that of stables." Martha Hirst, Mayor Dinkins' chief lobbyist in the City Council, says, "This will be about the fifth or sixth time this has come up in the last ten years. The lobbying never stops. I don't know what the answer is. I just know that I will be dealing with this issue forever, and someday I'm going to shoot myself. They shoot horses, don't they?"

SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES

RICHARD and Harold can talk forever about the history of underwear. They can describe a piece of lingerie as if



"Neil, here, is a retired Army general who has been on Ted Koppel a lot recently, shooting his mouth off."

• •

it were human life under a microscope. They understand completely how a slip can be, well, just a slip or, on the other hand, an evening gown. Richard Martin is the new curator of the New Costume Institute at the Metropolitan, and Harold Koda is the associate curator; they worked together for ten years at the Fashion Institute of Technology. Their new show—their first at the New Costume Institute—has been underwritten by the Natori Company, which has its own line of intimate clothing. The show is called "Infra-Apparel." The title may seem to be about underwear, but the show is not, exactly. It's about how, over the last two hundred years, nightgowns, bustiers, merry widows, and so on, have moved from the bedroom to the street.

Richard Martin and Harold Koda, who recently guided a preview tour around the show, which opens on April 1st, swear that all the garments in it descend from underwear, and that this clothing "manifests its structure in inner form and has a propensity to reveal its structure to us." That is questionable; you can look at most of it for hours and still see street clothes.

The dresses and other outer garments (underwear will appear only for reference, in cases on the wall) that will be seen on about a hundred mannequins when the exhibition opens were spread out over many air-conditioned rooms with off-white walls and linoleum floors and fluorescent lights. The Costume Institute was somewhat reminiscent of a hospital.

Harold has a certain rapport with dummies. In the Mannequin Preparation Room, eight rather short mannequins with no heads and no hands filled nineteenth-century white dresses that didn't especially resemble underwear, and when Harold demonstrated how each dummy's pelvis, buttocks, and bust differed from any of the others', he touched the stiff, fabric-covered bodies casually, like a doctor. Down the hall, he caressed the collarbone of one of twelve naked, bald Christy Turlington dummies and said, "She represents a post-nineteen-seventies woman. Her arms are more sinewy. The slope is longer." In one corridor were three or four male mannequins. When Harold was asked if there would be any evidence of men's underwear in the show, he said, "We don't want to see a lot of men's underwear. We see men's underwear in every bus shelter in New York."

Richard and Harold took what they said were underwear-inspired clothes off racks: a frightening black Gaultier item from 1991 that was more lingerie than dress ("Your legs show, and there's a train, and the midriff shows. It has a merry widow from the fifties," Harold said); from Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel a normal-looking pink-white-and-black plaid wool jacket with almost no skirt—just a few strips of black fabric, as if from one of those nightmares in which a woman goes out and forgets to put her skirt on ("Silk georgette torn and fringed. It plays around the legs," Harold said); three evening gowns by Saint Laurent, which, lying on long shelves, looked like three young women asleep in berths on a train after a reckless all-night party. A somewhat padded pale-pink quilted satin corset with garters was also lying on a shelf. It was not underwear and had belonged to Madonna—obviously.

A just-below-the-knee black Balenciaga Baby Doll dress had been worn and donated by Diana Vreeland, who was the special consultant to the Costume Institute from 1972 until her death, in 1989. It looked like something a woman could in fact spend the weekend under the covers in and then get up and go to the opera in. ("A swing cage of lace augmented by horsehair, 1957," Harold said. "Mrs. Vreeland is known to have said of it, 'If a young girl wore it, it would be banal.' ")

Did either Richard or Harold feel he was competing with Mrs. Vreeland?

"Richard's voice is too high," Harold said. Turning to Richard, he added, "But you'd look fabulous in the Baby Doll dress."

But seriously?

"I think not," Richard said. "It's so clear neither one of us is Mrs. Vreeland. She was an event." ♦

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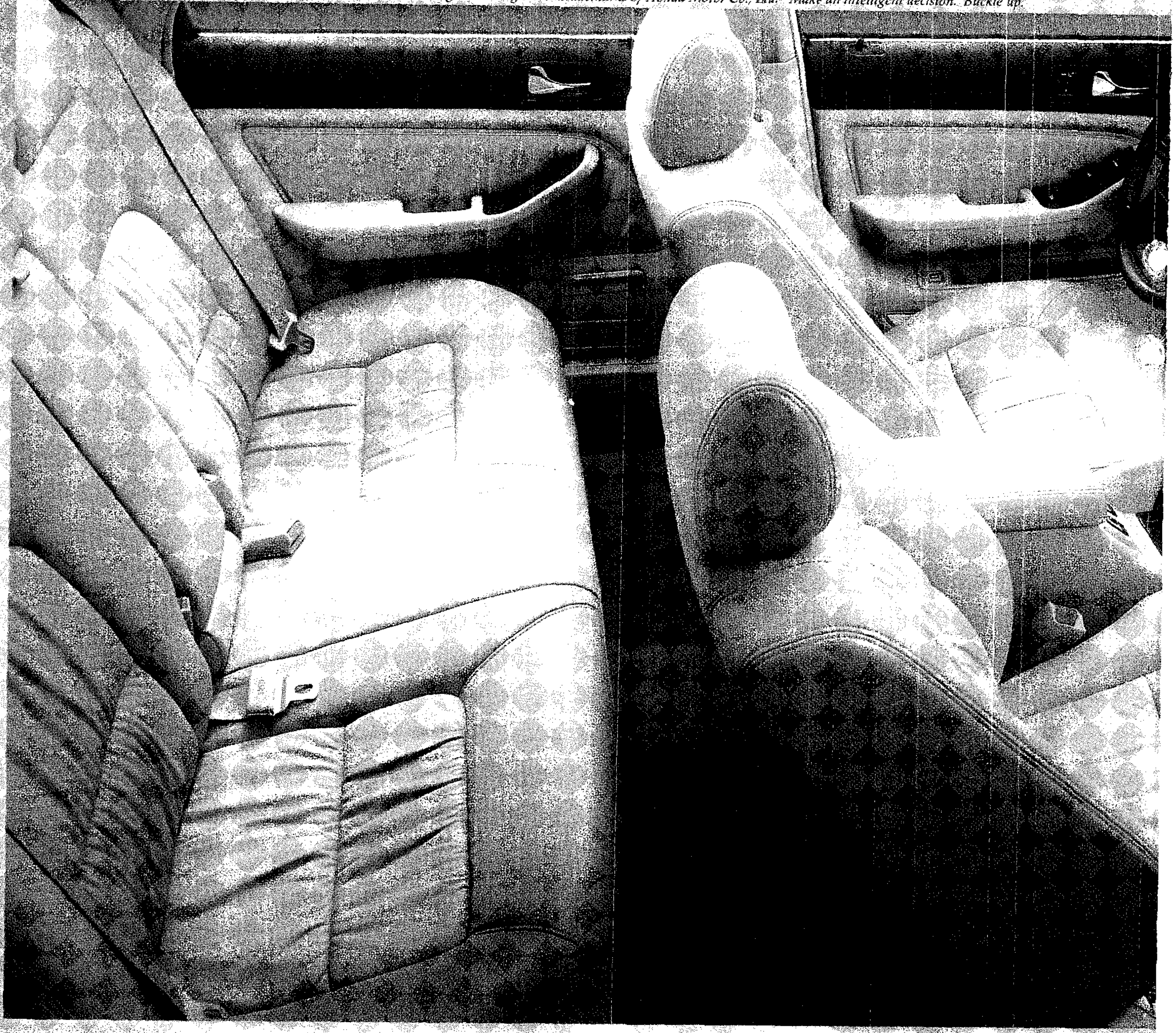

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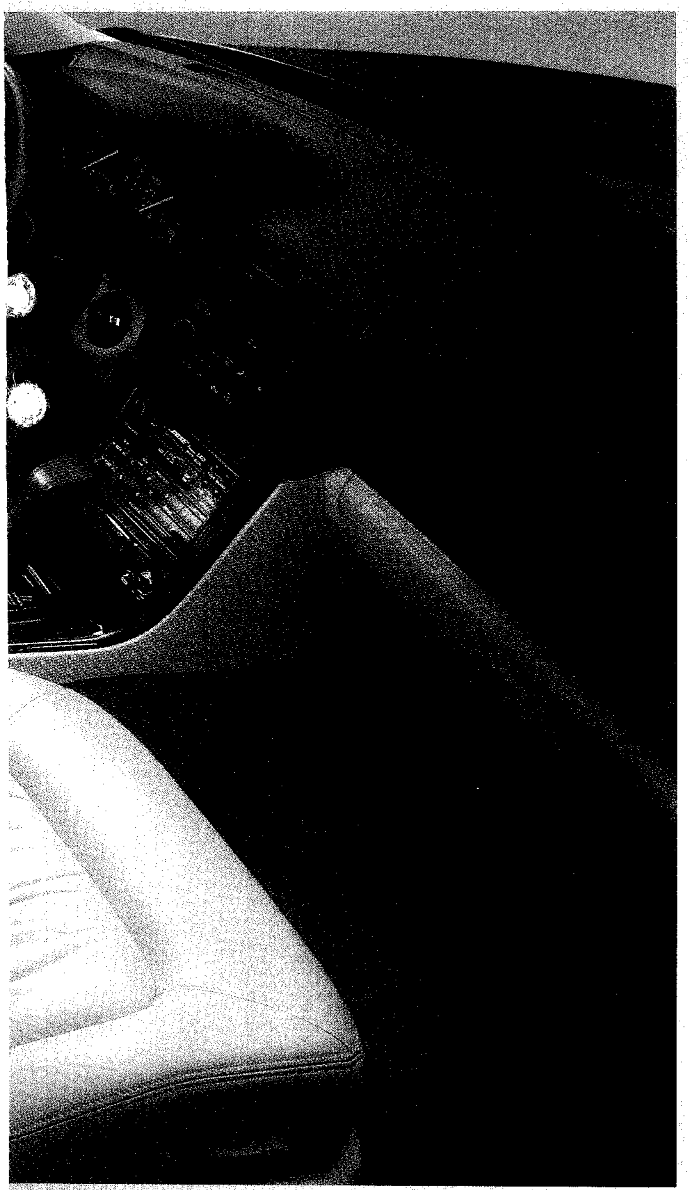

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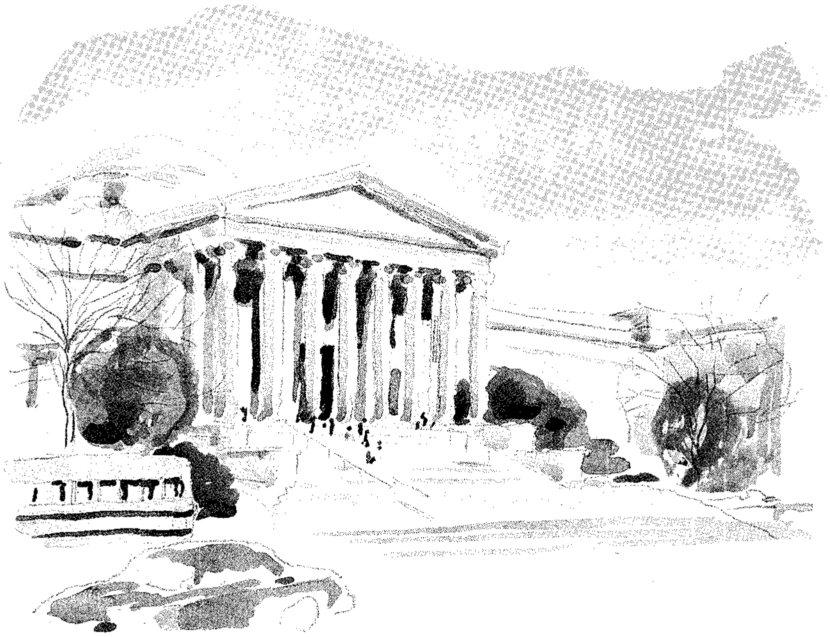
LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE SYNDICATED PRESIDENCY

Communications wonks are taking the White House press office into the future and Bill Clinton direct to the people, leaving the Big Media out of the picture.

BY SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL

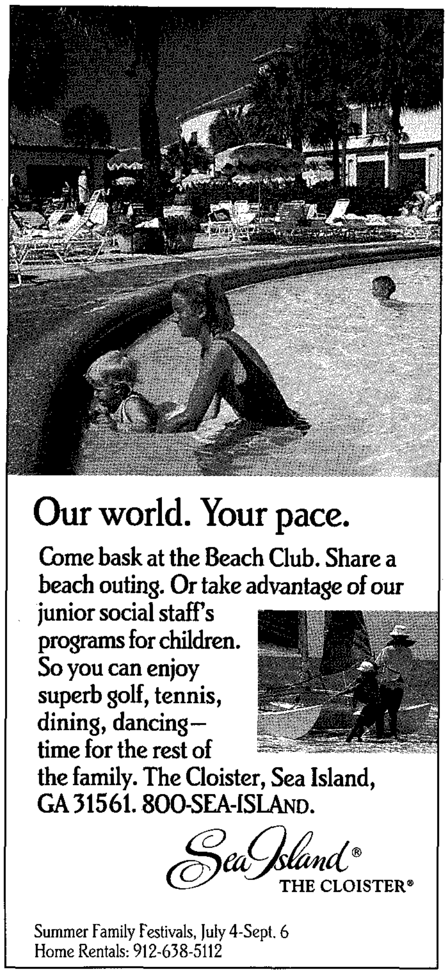


OLIVER WILLIAMS

EVERY spring thousands gather in Washington for a seasonal rite. It is not the Cherry Blossom Festival at the Tidal Basin; it is the celebration of, by, and for the national media at three drafty ballroom dinners. Virtually all the personages of the press, from network anchormen to provincial bureau chiefs, assemble, in black tie (the Radio & Television Correspondents' Association and the White House Correspondents' Association) or white (the Gridiron), for off-the-record festivities. Sprinkled among the tables as guests are notables of the Administration, Congress, and the Supreme Court, who are entertained by comedy and drag acts, and then light remarks by the President of the United States.

By March 18th, when Bill Clinton spoke at the Radio & Television Correspondents' dinner, the new President had held twenty-five sessions of one kind or another with representatives of the provincial media but he had not held a single press conference with those seated before him. They were his hosts, but he would not play host to them, with a full-dress press conference in the East Room, until March 23rd. The President was hardly embarrassed or apologetic. "You know why I can stiff you on the press conferences?" he asked. "Because Larry King liberated me by giving me to the American people directly."

"We're not pleased. It's really true," said Karen Hosler, a Washington correspondent for the Baltimore *Sun*, who is the president of the White House Correspondents' Association. Her complaints sound like the grieving of a union shop steward. "It is interesting the way they have really shut out the rank-and-file reporters who, day in and day out, go into the White House to cover the news. He's not given any interviews to anyone we would consider a White House reporter. He's given them to MTV; he's done things out in the field. Even that material is not available to the White House press corps." Clinton's elusiveness prompts Hosler to express nostalgia for the early months of the previous Administration, when President Bush invited the press to movie screenings in the White House, invited them to bounce on the bed in the Lincoln Bedroom, and parried their questions at a series of news conferences designed to display his un-Reaganlike familiarity with the existence of government. Bush loved going to dinner at the home of an



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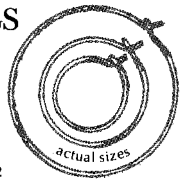

important bureau chief and hoisting his host's child for the home-movie camera. It was all part of the game in which all the players accepted their traditional roles. For some in the press, this highly choreographed relationship was deeply personal. "George Bush was a nice man who always treated us with respect as human beings," said Hosler. "How can you dislike someone like that?"

"Larry King" has become Clinton's metaphor for the diminishing influence of the Big Media. And this sentiment is not fuelled simply by pique at the press for its invasive forays into the so-called character issue during the Democratic primaries. Clinton seeks accurate, immediate, politically sensitive transmission of his policies. For that reason, he has embraced the very technology that the media had believed was their monopoly: the electronic filigree, space satellites, and computer networks that are the pen and pencil of the modern press are also available to the White House. Clinton's campaign organizers mastered these instruments, and now in power the same individuals are not about to relinquish them. The narrowcasting that began when the candidate appeared with shades and sax on "Arsenio Hall" has been honed. Its purpose is no longer to elect Clinton, of course, or even merely to sustain his popularity. Policy and politics have merged: the Clinton Administration is an accelerating political machine, geared to the passage of programs. Constituencies and legislators are targeted with precision, in media market after media market. Clinton's perpetual motion, his permanent campaign, is dictated, above all, by the system of checks and balances, which demands that he mobilize public pressures on legislators if he wishes to achieve anything. (Nowhere in the Federalist Papers is there a prophetic hint of the permanent campaign, but it is a natural by-product of Madisonianism.) Every one of the President's appearances in local media demonstrates his driven strategy: from Milwaukee to Shreveport, from North Dakota to Nebraska, he has been making appeals to pull opposing or fence-sitting senators his way. The national press, and especially the network news, is too blunt, too unfocussed, too superficial. It is inadequate at both ends of the spectrum: not only is it unable to provide intense immediacy to specific groups and places but its compulsive reduction of reality to sound-bite dimensions makes it incapable of carrying broad, sustained explanation. Though Clinton was to hold his first press conference less than a week after his pointed remark at the Radio & Television dinner, it was hardly an acknowledgment that the old forms of the media were back in place. When Ronald Reagan was elected President, CNN and C-SPAN were just getting off the ground. The networks did not offer footage of national and international events tailored to an affiliate's market; there was no independent company like Conus Communications to provide this service. Big Media, as they related to national politics, were a fairly settled oligopoly: there were two or three newsmagazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, occasionally *US News*); two or three newspapers (the *Times*, the *Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, occasionally the fading *Star*); the wires; and the three networks. Big Media, however, are no more likely to make a triumphant return than are the big bands.

FROM the first floor of the Old Executive Office Building one can observe television reporters doing their standups on the White House lawn all day long. Behind them lies the downstairs West Wing entrance to the pressroom, hermetically sealed from the rest of the White House, unless special permission has been granted. This is the view from the office of Jeff Eller, the White House director of media affairs. He wears no tie, and the collar of his lightly starched shirt is unbuttoned. On his clean desk (there's not even a scrap of hard copy on it) is a Macintosh PowerBook, much prized by the White House. ("When we took office, I walked into the Oval Office—it's supposed to be the nerve center of the United States—and we found Jimmy Carter's telephone system," an amazed Clinton told employees at Silicon Graphics, in California, on February 22nd. "Then we went down into the basement, where we found Lyndon Johnson's switchboard. True story—where there were four operators working from early morning till late at night—literally, when a phone call would come . . . they would pick up a little cord and push it into a little hole. That's today, right?") On a table next to Eller's desk are a Microsoft baseball cap and a large pitcher of iced tea. He chomps on a cigar, which he is prohibited by new White House rules from light-

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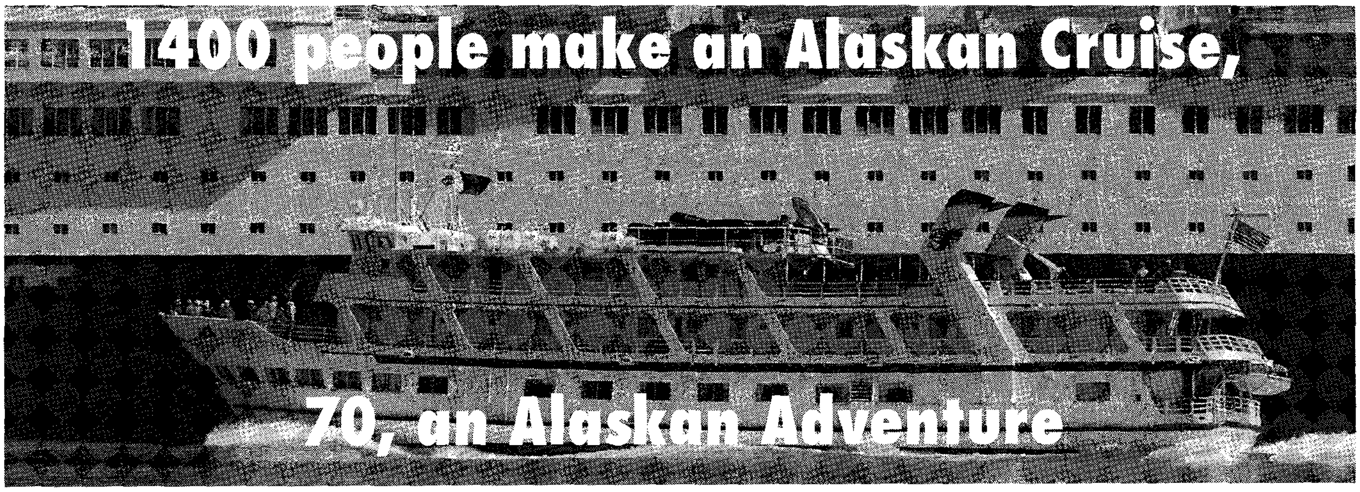
ing. On his door he has posted a sign: "When entering this room, DO NOT SAY: 'We've never done it that way before.' "

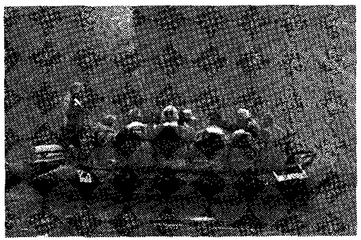
Eller has just returned from a meeting in the West Wing, at which it was decided that Clinton must communicate his military-conversion program to those states hardest hit by base closings. In his office, Eller has convened his staff to arrange Presidential press conferences with Florida, California, and Connecticut media—events invisible to the national press. Eller, at thirty-seven, is the elder statesman; most members of his staff are twenty-something. No one wears a tie or a suit, but everyone wears beepers. Some have buzz-cut spiked haircuts. Doors are open all the time. Everyone works fourteen-hour days, and on breaks some relax by reading the magazine *Wired*.

The staff attempts to tap every media outlet except the Washington correspondents. Eller has divided the country into four quadrants. Within each region, local radio stations, television stations, and newspapers are called daily to see if they'd be interested in an interview with an Administration figure. (There is a thick loose-leaf media book for every state. "These are my bibles," said Kim Hopper, who handles the Western region.) The previous day, Leon Panetta, the budget director, had done an interview on the Dakota Radio Network, which consists of thirty-eight stations, and Tipper Gore had been interviewed by eight small Florida papers. Cabinet members are expected to be on call. On the fourth floor of the Old Executive Office Building, a television studio is in regular use. Aides estimate that they help stage at least one major media event a day, sometimes more. On March 24th, for example, the event was helping eleven visiting Democratic governors get interview after interview to voice their support for the investment part of Clinton's economic plan.

Press briefings and documents are constantly and instantly transmitted into cyberspace on computer networks like CompuServe and America Online. Presidential schedules, sometimes weeks in advance, are sent out on another computer network, US Newswire. (Exclusive press interviews, national or local, are not listed on the public schedule. Nor are transcripts of them released to other members of the media before the news is broadcast or printed. Press conferences of all kinds are included in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*. And all White House releases are being archived, for the first time, in computer files, available to anyone on computer networks. On America Online "clinton pz" is the E-mail address for the White House.) Eller dreams of a C-SPAN-like channel to broadcast White House events around the clock: BC-TV, he calls it. He can't figure out how to finance it, however, or be sure that there would be enough public functions to broadcast.

Now he's concerned about Clinton's three press conferences with local media on base closings. "Here's who needs to be there," he tells his staff. "All television stations in Miami, the three network affiliates, the two big Hispanic stations. We need the defense writer for the Miami *Herald*, and make a call to the A.P. to see if they want to send anybody. We will invite INZ and IOD radio. We want to do a statewide California press conference. We need to issue an invitation to all television stations in San Jose,





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San Diego, L.A., San Francisco. In addition, the San Diego paper (there's only one, right?), and the L.A. *Times*, L.A. *Daily News*, San Jose *Mercury*, the *Chronicle*, the *Examiner*, and I'm not opposed to one person from the A.P. from California. We should extend the invitation to KGO radio. But the deal is they will sit as a group with the President."

"Will the Sacramento *Bee* be involved?" an aide asks.

"Good idea, invite the *Bee*. Invite Sacramento TV, too. And the third group is Connecticut. Same thing." Everyone rushes out of the room.

On March 13th, in the Roosevelt Room, often used as a workspace in the White House inner sanctum, thirteen members of the southern Florida press corps met the President, who was informally attired in a sweater, creating a further intimacy. For the reporters, the encounter was unique and perhaps thrilling. From the point of view of the regular White House correspondents, Clinton was not making real news, which must be *national* news. For Clinton, though, this was a chance to get extended exposure in those places most affected by his policies. He made an opening statement, enumerating a seven-point program dealing with the region. The questions that followed were all about southern Florida—Homestead Air Force base, specific economic-conversion plans, Haitian refugees, and, of course, Cuba. These were not questions that the White House correspondents would be likely to ask: they were too detailed and narrow. But they were not "softballs." They were carefully and sometimes sharply posed. ("Mr. President, in South Florida, there is a feeling among some people, a sense of betrayal. . . .") For a President unacquainted with the arcane details of domestic policies, these would have been difficult pitches. Reagan or Bush, in such a setting, might have floundered. But Clinton has a depth of empirical knowledge that he displays at length. "We just have blind faith in the guy," said Eller.

Eller is the ideal man for his job, because he was once one of those he's now targeting. After attending Purdue for two and a half years without graduating, he worked in radio news in Crawfordsville, became a television reporter in Terre Haute, was elevated to a radio-news director's job, in Chattanooga, and then worked for five years at

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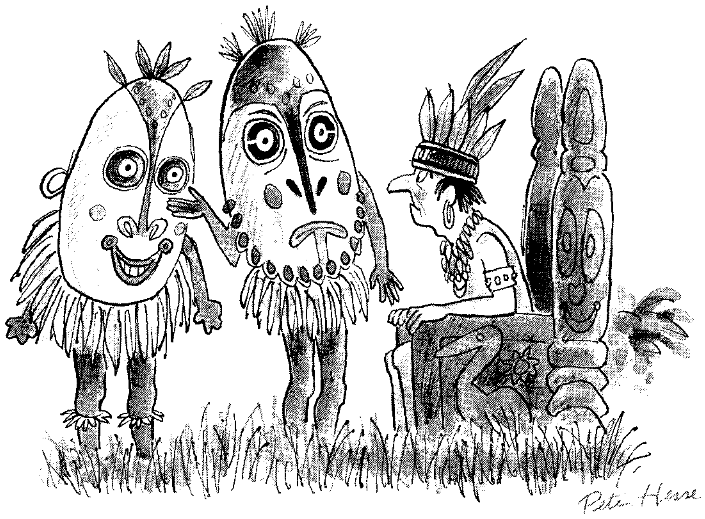

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FRATELLI ROSSETTI

a Nashville TV station as an assignment editor and reporter. Eller left journalism for politics to work as a press secretary for a congressman, Bill Boner, who was about to be investigated for bribery. (The Justice Department dropped the case, and Boner eventually left the House to become Mayor of Nashville.) "These kids come in and say, 'I'm having a bad day,' and I say, 'You know what a bad day is? A bad day is having two U.S. marshals hand you a subpoena for a federal grand jury in the basement of the Longworth Building—that's a bad day.' But it taught me a lot about crisis management. I don't think I'm that tough, but, you know, there ain't a whole lot of things that come up that really cause me to get real white. So I couldn't have had better training, although I wouldn't wish it on anybody." Handling disaster was Eller's credential, recommending him to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and it sent him to the most unstable districts. Eller is a unique version of the politico as wonk, able to traverse the two hemispheres of the Clintonian brain.

Eller's first job for Clinton was directing the Florida campaign in the primary, where Paul Tsongas was undone. There Eller invented "talking points"—daily faxes to activists and officials to keep them coördinated with the campaign's themes. It was a simple idea, on "old technology," said Eller, yet an innovation adapted for the campaign which had the effect of allowing Clinton's key supporters to feel connected. "He's the one who understood the technology to keep all the states on the same message," Ruth Hunter, the deputy campaign manager in California, said of Eller. He also pulled network feeds from satellites during the day, before the stories were broadcast, and doing that allowed the campaign to ride the media waves. Whenever Bush appeared in an important media market, Eller saturated it the day after with interviews with Clinton by satellite. Eller was also responsible for maintaining the high velocity of response to any negative attack—responding within the same news cycle, so that the charge would not stand without its rebuttal.

Eller has carried the momentum of the campaign into the White House, adapting and extending the technology: a countervailing power to the Big Media, without any ideological imputation. "We'd like to give the public a broader view, and put information into the hands of affiliate TV and let it decide what's relevant," he said. "You're giving more editorial empowerment to local TV as opposed to a desk assistant who's never been out of Manhattan. You're changing filters."

Other Presidents have also attempted to go around, manipulate, or control the national press. But what Clinton is doing, motivated principally by his own political agenda and his facility with technology, is new. It was not really possible until the world of three-network media became anachronistic.

"The press is the enemy," Richard Nixon said many times. The media embodied the "establishment," which he loathed and believed was out to destroy him. To counter it, he created the "communications office," which enabled him, and Presidents after him, to reach beyond the West Wing pressroom. He supplemented his aboveground activity with darker methods: false front groups, false letter-writing campaigns to support the President, false leaks—a Potemkin Village populism.

Three-network television had established a new political ecosystem, in which the tactile pols like Hubert Humphrey began to die out. The Reagan Presidency may be best remembered as a succession of tableaux vivants, staged by the directors and producers of his White House. "I never thought of going around the Washington press corps," Michael Deaver, Reagan's chief impresario, said. The press, as Deaver saw it, was indispensable—performing the functions of key grip, camera operator, sound recordist, gaffer, and best boy. "We planned several weeks in advance what our story was going to be every day. The media were like starlings on a line."

George Bush disdained Reagan's skill at communication, regarding it as a form of legerdemain. Bush had a hierarchical view tempered only by his self-identification as a Washington player, the political sportsman. For him, the key relationships were offstage, which is why his ultimate form of communication was the thank-you note.

Bush hired a producer from ABC's "Nightline," Dorrance Smith, to develop innovative communications, yet Bush remained the incorrigible incumbent of Washington court politics. "We tried to do as many local stations as we had time for," said Smith. "The difference is that we didn't do that at the expense of the Washington press corps." Bush wanted to play the game as he understood it, a game of the status quo. "A lot of the stuff Eller is talking about, but by no means all of it, was suggested," said Tony Snow, who was for a while Bush's chief speechwriter. "No one wanted to do it. No one cared—nobody on the senior staff, no chief of staff. For the most part, for senior Bush officials the world had not changed since 1988. They only had to re-create it and they would win. They were wrong." Bush's final slogan was a pathetic attack on those he had so assiduously courted: "Annoy the liberal media. Reëlect Bush."

Bill Clinton is like the old-style politician who is the student of human nature and focusses on the voter in front of him. The premium is on the personal encounter. But, unlike the old-style pol, Clinton can perform this seduction before cameras. Unlike Reagan, whose ideal situations involved packaged sound-bites, Clinton is the improviser. He loves being unprotected before audiences, with no scrim. It is the sign that he is open to them; in revealing *his* feelings he showcases the voter's, attempting to create an intimate bond. ("I feel your pain.") Clinton offers a benediction in the sacred language of therapy: our fireside chat. He is the chairman of the Inner Children's Defense Fund. Reagan, who was hard-of-hearing, could read off the teleprompter with perfect inflection; Clinton riffs off teleprompters, and turns politics into a listening contest. He tosses scripts aside: the new narrative is episodic; the new temperament is interactive, a work in progress, going beyond technocratic tinkering to reinvent government.

Clinton's political advisers all understand these elements. Stanley Greenberg, his pollster, said, "There is a powerful impression that Clinton listens to people. It is perhaps the strongest element of his character at the moment. It's seen to be his genuine character. Empathy and caring are essential to his identity. The technology of the White House is catching up to who he is."

George Stephanopoulos, the communications director, said, "The means is an end as well. The technique says something about the kind of President Clinton wants to be and the kind of government he wants to run—a government in touch, a value in and of itself."

The Washington press corps will hardly disappear, but its old forms are in relative decline. Its fall may be attributed partly to its hubris. In the 1988 campaign, press stories actually drove Gary Hart and Joe Biden from the Presidential primaries. "Somebody had to prune the field," Paul Taylor, of the Washington *Post*—who had asked Hart at a press conference whether he'd committed adultery—wrote in his 1990 book, "See How They Run." "It simply wasn't practical for voters to make choices among a dozen or more contenders. . . . The assignment fell to the press—there was no one else."

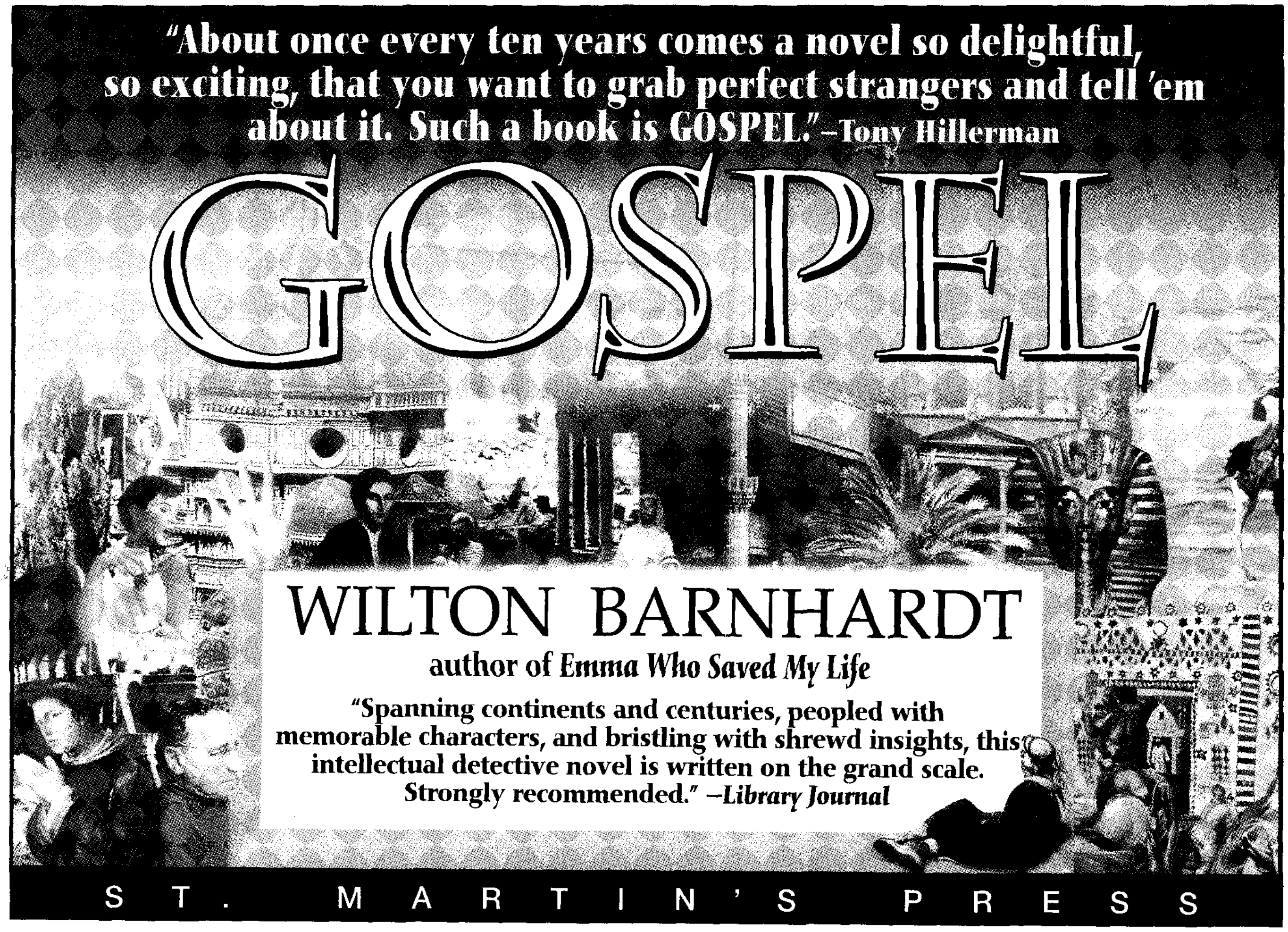
After Clinton's victory, the national press began to suffer, at least a bit, the painful process known in the business world as disintermediation; that is, eliminating the middleman. What the President seeks is unmediated communication.

The future struggles for control may not be just between the national press and the President but among various levels of the media themselves. Paul Friedman, executive vice-president of ABC News, told one newspaper reporter that he had asked affiliates "not to let themselves be used by the White House communications office and to reject their offers." "I don't blame them for doing what they're doing," he said later. "What seems to be different is the degree to which this is being done."

Tracy Bryan, a reporter with KCRA, in Sacramento, who was part of the contingent invited to interview the President about base closings, said, "I would not have been happy if I were a national-press-corps member and the local yokels got access. But I like it that Clinton goes to the people and opens himself up. I see both sides."

The situation is not static. It is conceivable that the media universe of today will seem as antiquated in a few years as the one of the early nineteen-eighties seems now. "We'll have five hundred channels and interactive channels, and we'll have both by the next election," said Mandy Grunwald, Clinton's director of advertising during the campaign and a political consultant who often advises him in the White House. "What makes it hard and fun is that it's addition, not a zero-sum game."

Clinton's media operations do not exist in a vacuum, like much of Reagan's, which used the press to project rehearsed images. Clinton exposes himself as no President before him has, and he does so in the service of his policies. Stephanopoulos says, "In the end, we'll be judged by what we do, not how we do it." But the Presidency is the nation's most personal office, and the sense of Clinton's emerging program is inextricable from the emerging sense of his personality. ♦



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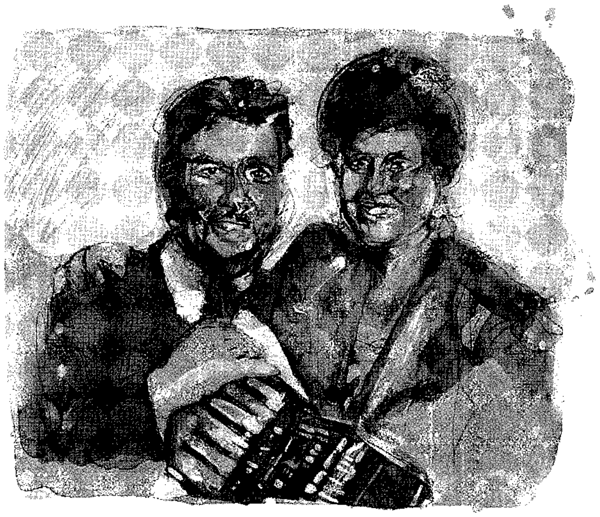
TABLES FOR TWO

FIRE AND ICE

Marano and Monteiro scat, swing, harmonize, and hum better than anyone else playing today—and they're still one of the best-kept secrets in cabaret.

BY WHITNEY BALLIETT

No more lyrical, subtle, and exhilarating jazz-cabaret group exists than the New York duo of Marano and Monteiro. But you have to look sharp to find them. Because of their unfashionable makeup—two voices, accompanied by Monteiro's encyclopedic accordion—they are still working the fringes: half a dozen or so one-night stands a year at J's, on upper Broadway; four Sundays in a row at Zinno, in the Village; a single shot at the cabaret festival in Town Hall last fall; a concert, with two other groups, at the JVC jazz festival this summer; gigs in Edgewater and Montclair, New Jersey. The duo's music is so intimate and smooth and quick on its feet that it demands a small room and intense concentration. It also deserves two different kinds of hearing—in the flesh, where you can listen with your eyes, as most people do, and at home, where you can work your way slowly through the duo's exceptional new CD, "A Perfect Match," on the Denon label.



When Monteiro alters a chord, or changes quarter notes to eighth notes, Marano sails serenely past, aware and appreciative but unflappable.

MICHAEL TROSSMAN

Marano and Monteiro are Nancy Marano, a singer, pianist, arranger, and songwriter who teaches at the Manhattan School of Music and appears several nights a week by herself in Peacock Alley at the Waldorf, and Eddie Monteiro, a virtuoso accordionist and singer who pieces out a living by playing weddings and private parties. They belong to a curious, idiosyncratic tradition in jazz—that of singing-and-playing duos, trios, quartets, and the like. These groups, preceded by the New Orleans spasm bands of the teens and twenties (homemade instruments, improvised lyrics), were often regarded as novelties, because they used odd instrumentations and a lot of razzmatazz. They took hold around 1930, and included the Mills Brothers, who became increasingly homogenized; the peppy, swinging Sunshine Boys, made up of Dan and Joe Mooney (Joe, singing and accompanying himself on accordion and organ, later had his own smooth, indirectly lit groups); the famous Boswell Sisters (Martha, Vet, and Connee), who, equally peppy and swinging, were also notable for tight harmony and shifting tempos (they even used Charlie Mingus accelerando and decelerando), and for Connee's powerful contralto (she, a white woman, had listened to Bessie Smith, and, turnabout, Ella Fitzgerald listened to her); the Spirits of Rhythm, a jumping quintet that numbered the extraordinary stream-of-consciousness scat singer Leo Watson; and Slim (Gaillard) and Slam (Stewart), the former a scat singer who invented an early form of hip-nonsense talk, and the latter a first-rate bassist who hit upon a new sound—humming in octave unison with his bowed bass. In the early sixties, the Swingle Singers, started in France by an American, and consisting of four men and four women, fashioned a kind of twentieth-century plainsong out of Bach and Purcell and Beethoven. (By now, these groups no longer accompanied themselves but relied on traditional rhythm sections.) And, over here, Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross (Dave Lambert, Jon Hendricks, and Annie Ross) sang ingenious, bebop-infused copies of recordings by Count Basie, Horace Silver, and Duke Ellington, fitting out their melodic lines (ensemble and solo) with jivy lyrics by Hendricks. Then the tradition stalled; most of the groups that followed L. H. & R. were, until the arrival of Marano and Monteiro, neos or parodies of earlier groups.

Marano and Monteiro first met in the mid-seventies, but began working together only six years ago—one night a week in a noisy television bar in Orangeburg, New York. They recently talked about their lives. They talked separately, but everything each said seemed to reflect or corroborate what the other said, as if they were talking together. They both speak quickly, Marano aiming in and Monteiro, a classic extrovert, aiming out.

MARANO: I grew up in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, a mile or two south of the George Washington Bridge. My father is Italian and my mother Czech. My father, Nick Marano, was a classically trained pianist, but he could play anything. When he was nineteen, Vincent Lopez hired him for his band at the Taft Hotel. He was on staff at WINS when radio stations had live music, and he did jingles and Broadway rehearsals, and even opera rehearsals, and he did club dates. Then he went out on his own. For a long time, he was the pianist at the Paris in the Sky restaurant in the Hotel Suburban, in East Orange. It was owned by Dorothy Kilgallen and Dick Kollmar, and that job put my sister and me through the Manhattan School of Music. But the best thing about my father was that he made you *want* to please him. He insisted that my sister and I start off classically, and when we were ten and eleven he brought in a teacher from Juilliard, a man named Yehuda Guttman, to teach all of us, himself included, which for him meant brushing up on his Chopin.

MONTEIRO: Both my parents were Portuguese. They settled in the Portuguese colony in Newark, and I was born

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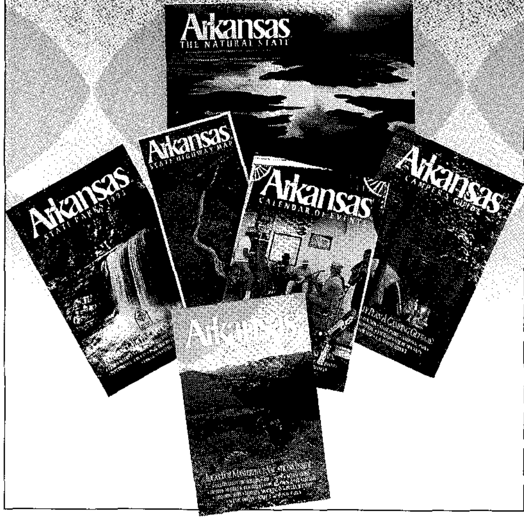
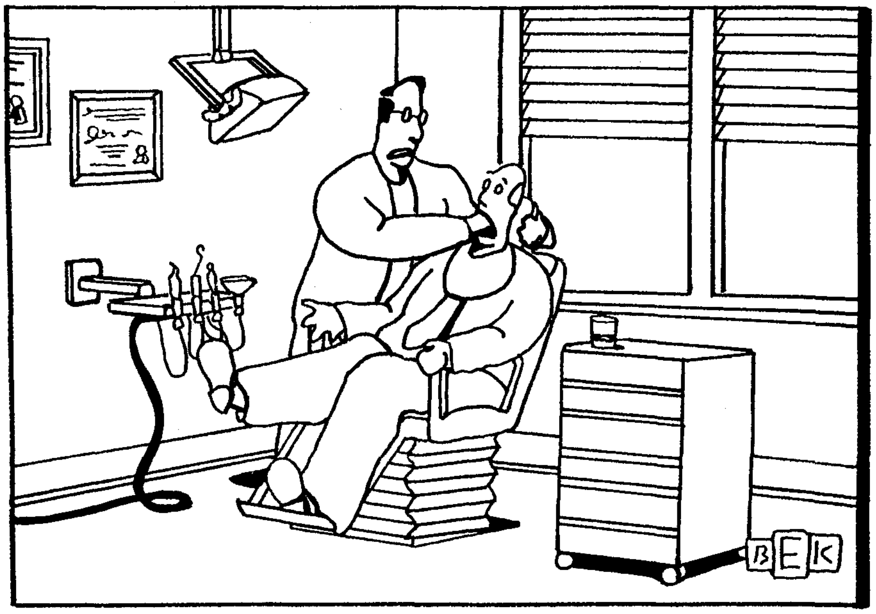




"Gee, this is like pulling teeth."

• •

there. My father ran a bar in Newark, Jimmy's Roscommon House, which he took over from an Irishman. I never saw him when I was a kid, because all he did was work. My mother was a great seamstress who did piecework in a factory. She decided that her first kid—me—would play the accordion, and I started lessons when I was five with a taskmaster named Charlie Nunzio. My mother was mean about it. She used to tie me to a chair to make me practice. I learned transcriptions of classical pieces—Bach inventions and Liszt pieces with four-octave runs. I also listened to the popular accordionists—Art Van Damme and Leon Sash and Joe Mooney.

MARANO: I was a piano major at the Manhattan School, and I studied with Robert Goldsand. My sister, June, and I both teach there now—she's an opera coach, and I'm in the jazz division. I never studied formal singing. I always sang as a kid, but I didn't want a classical sound. I wanted a jazz sound. I listened to Ella's songbook albums and to Sarah Vaughan and Lena Horne. I listened to Peggy Lee's pitch and understatement and to Mel Tormé's records with Marty Paich. And I listened to the harmonies of the Hi-Los—and so did Eddie. Now I'm listening to Shirley Horn, who knows everything about space, silence. But I don't know what's going to happen to our music—where the young singers are going to come from. I do workshops every summer in Venice for the Manhattan School, and we get kids from all over Europe. They can sing Betty Carter and Bobby McFerrin note for note, but they have no idea what the melodies are that Carter and McFerrin base their singing on. And when you try and take them back to the originals they can't do them.

MONTEIRO: When I was thirteen or fourteen, maybe a little older, I heard the great Brazilian accordionist Sivuca, and it was like primitive man discovering fire. He accompanied Miriam Makeba and Harry Belafonte, and he sang along in unison with what he played, and that's where I learned the trick—not from Slam Stewart or Major Holley, although I did pick up some things later from Major. I went to the New York College of Music, which was eventually taken over by N.Y.U. They didn't know what to do with me when I applied: "An accordionist? We don't teach accordion." Well, I had perfect pitch, which I demonstrated, and I played a two-part Bach invention and the toughest part of Liszt's "Spanish Rhapsody," and they took me on as a theory major.

MARANO: I first met Eddie when we were doing a private party for Peter Duchin. I had started doing club dates after a one-year contract with Columbia Records didn't lead anywhere and I didn't break into the jingle-singer world, which is what I wanted to do. You don't have much chance to sing creatively on club dates, and I think it was only after Eddie and I began working together that I really developed. He has an incredible gift. He approaches music from a gut point of view, almost from a child-like view. He's mischievous, and he loves surprises. I'll catch that look out of the corner of his eye when he alters a chord behind me or drops in a new rhythmic pattern. It's a did-she-hear-*that* look. We hear together harmonically and musically and personally. We don't argue. If I worry, he lightens me up. If he gets too wild, I quiet him. It's a marriage of sorts.

MONTEIRO: When I first heard Nancy, I thought, Well, here's another chirp. But I learned right away that she had an uncolored sound, a pure voice. I also discovered that I couldn't shake her, that I couldn't make her branch break if I injected any surprises into what I was doing. I like horsing around musically. Once, when we were on the stand at J's, three women at a front table were talking loudly about whether they were going to pay their bill with a check or cash, and when I went into my solo I worked in the words "No checks, just cash," and broke the place up. I love experimenting with harmony. Harmony is like a painter's palette. I don't want to work just in black-and-white. I want to use pink and blue and green. Nancy understands that, because she's as into harmony as I am. She also keeps me in line. She tells me how to dress, and she corrects the pronunciation I use when I sing: "That's not 'Woncha,' Eddie. It's 'Won't you.' "

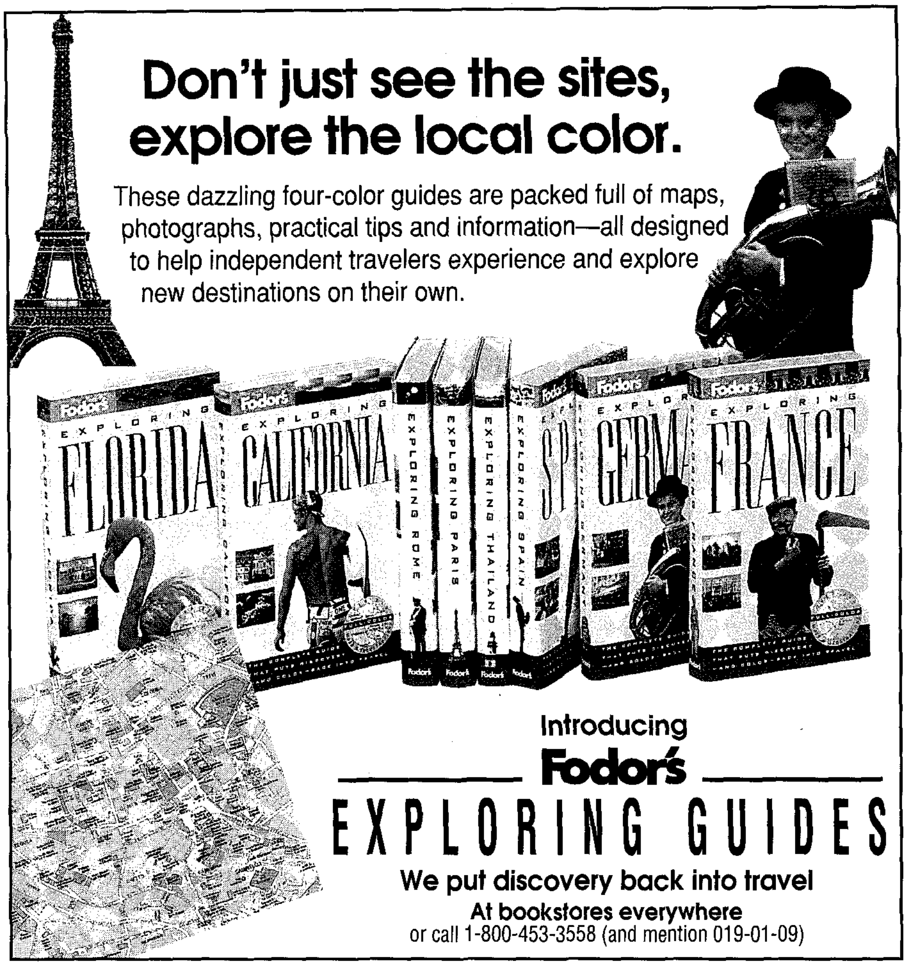
MARANO and Monteiro generally rehearse once a week. They usually meet in the living room of the apartment she and her seventeen-year-old daughter, Joanna, share in Fort Lee. (Monteiro lives with his wife and their thirteen-year-old son, E.J., in East Hanover, New Jersey.) They rehearsed late one morning a couple of days before their last appearance at J's, in February. The room was full of light and greenery and books and records. There was a sofa and a chair with huge, slablike cushions on one side of the room and a dining-room table under the windows on the other side. Marano, complaining of a bad back, which she said she woke with that morning, sat awkwardly on the sofa. She has the conventional Italian beauty of wide-set dark eyes, dark hair, and curves. Monteiro is blustery-handsome, with heavy eyebrows, a brush cut, and a small beard. He sat on a kitchen chair in front of the sofa, his accordion on his left knee (accordions weigh from twenty to thirty pounds) and rows of sheet music arranged on the floor. As Marano had explained a day or two earlier, the duo devours material. Some instrumental jazz groups play only three numbers in a fifty-minute set, but Marano and Monteiro's numbers rarely last more than five minutes, and in the course of two or three sets they'll perform thirty songs. And since a lot of their fans appear every time they play they constantly need new material. Marano chooses most of their songs. If Monteiro likes a new song, she sketches an arrangement, or they work it out together; if he doesn't, she puts it aside.

She balanced the sheet music of David Raksin's "The Bad and the Beautiful" on the edge of the sofa, where they could both see it. She sang the first sixteen bars, with Monteiro playing organ chords behind her, his eyebrows raised. Just before the bridge, he stopped, saying, "Hey, man. I'm not crazy about it. In fact, I don't like it. I'd probably use nothing but strings behind you if we did it."

She replaced the Raksin with Benny Golson's classic minor-key "Whisper Not." They settled immediately into the concentration and tribal communication unique to jazz musicians. They used few words, seemed to predict each other's thoughts, and moved steadily forward, their frequent hesitations and pauses notwithstanding. They skipped glances off each other when one of them produced a good phrase, and they grunted and sighed and said "no"s and "yes"es without knowing they were saying anything. They were sitting in the room, but they were really inside the music, the door closed.

As Marano sang a chorus of "Whisper Not," Monteiro played offbeat chords behind her. He shifted into stop-time chords, and they scatted in unison on the second chorus, and stopped just before the bridge.

"It's tight, intricate work, this thing," he said. "We won't change it much." He suddenly played eight bars of George Shearing's "Lullaby of Birdland," hoping he could fit it into the vicinity of the bridge. Sticking bits and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pieces of other songs into the one he is doing cheers him.

"I don't see the purpose of 'Lullaby' right there," she said.

"But I don't want to disappoint George," he replied. Shearing frequently comes to hear them. "He told me his newest joke on the phone the other day. He and Ellie have been spending summers in the Cotswolds, in England, you know, and cows come right up to their cottage. George said he asked the cows which Duke Ellington song they liked best, and they 'Mooed Indigo.' "

She said, "Shearing's puns! I don't know how Ellie stands it."

They scatted the rest of the second chorus together, first in unison, then in counterpoint. "I wish the bridge were longer," she said. "It doesn't seem like eight bars."

Monteiro suddenly began to improvise, closing his eyes and humming a beautiful unison falsetto with what he was playing. When he reached the bridge, Marano came in and sang the final sixteen bars. They ended on an abrupt high note.

"Hey, you can't use such a high note for an ending, Eddie. A note like that shrinks your cords, and if we went into 'Autumn Nocturne' next, which starts on a low D, nothing would come out."

"O.K., you got it. You know, even with all this rehearsing, I feel like a boxer when we get up there on the stand in front of an audience. After the first number, I say to myself, 'Are you cut? Are you bleeding?' "

She nodded.

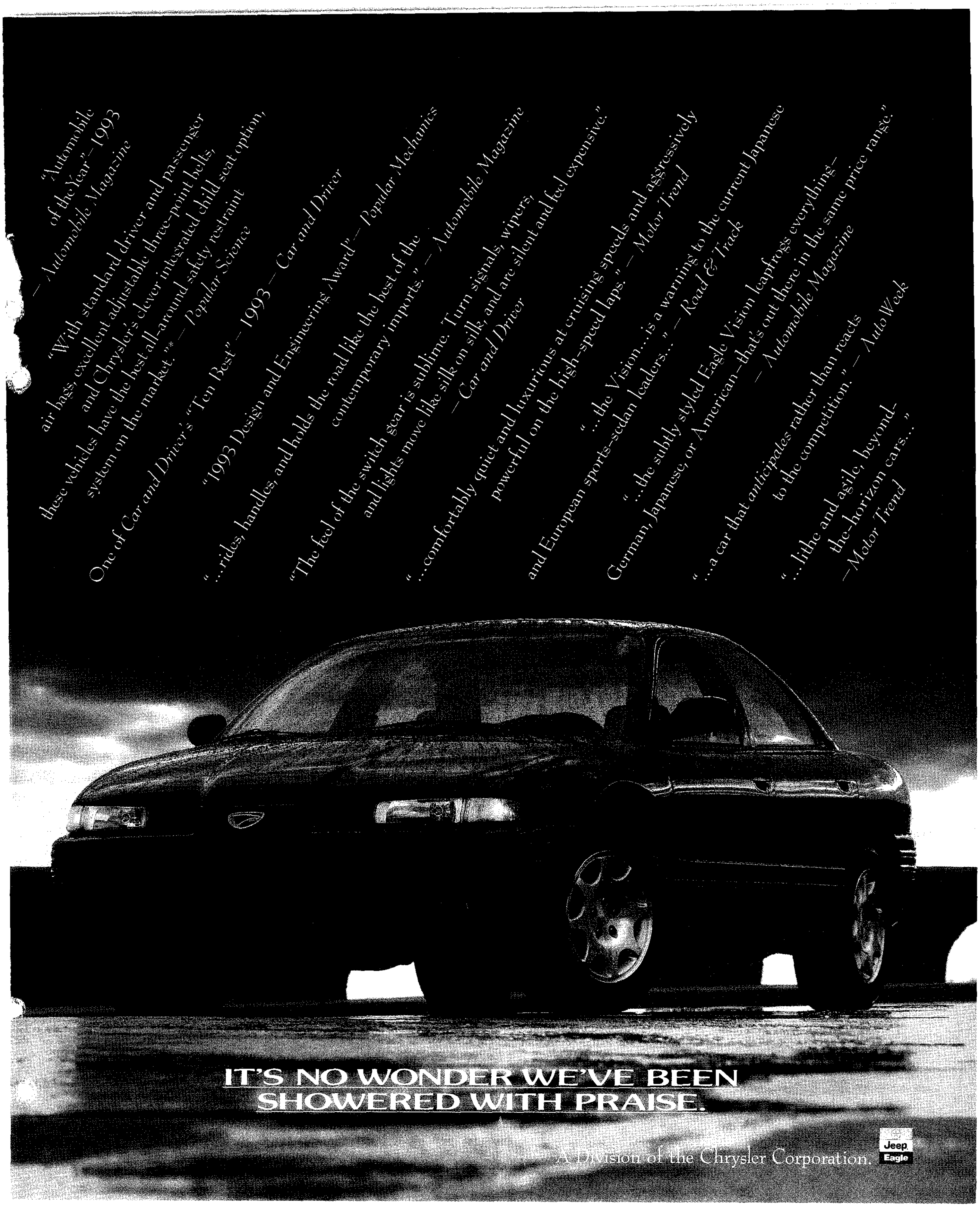
The rehearsal ended eight or nine songs later. Monteiro unstrapped his accordion and put it on the floor. He looked at a big tray of croissants and Danish that Marano had put out before they started. "Gee, I never saw those." Monteiro loves to eat, and is developing an impressive Eugene Pallette.

"Don't, Eddie. Sit down at the table. I'm bringing out a pasta salad."

SARAH VAUGHAN and Ella Fitzgerald and perhaps Mel Tormé move through the far background of Marano's singing, but she has her own strong, effortless alto. She is a true jazz singer. She plays hob with the beat. Her diction is immaculate. She is not afraid of timbre or of striving for certain dangerous effects. In her final chorus on the duo's recorded version of Duncan Lamont's marvellous lament "I Told You So," she uses Billie Holiday dirty tones, and she even breaks her voice—with devastating results. She has a big voice, but she handles it so deftly and coolly (she seems never to miss a note) that it has none of the smothering quality of, say, Sarah Vaughan's. (She sings the patter words in the middle of Jobim's "One Note Samba" so fast they become a verbal glissando.) She is a perfect foil for Monteiro's musical high jinks. When he alters a chord, or emphasizes a different syllable in a word, or changes quarter notes to eighth notes, she sails serenely past, aware and appreciative but unflappable. He sometimes speaks of the accordion, which he says goes back to China, as having a reputation that is a "nemesis," and so it has. But, much in the manner of the great tubist Harvey Phillips, who in the past thirty years has raised the tuba single-handed from a Falstaffian laughingstock to a canonized eloquence, Monteiro has made the accordion into a swinging virtuoso kaleidoscope. Adroitly mixing all his instrumental sounds (there are sixty-four, including organ, piano, pizzicato bass, flute, strings, and brass), he turns air into music that has never been heard before and that has nothing to do with the soapy, lachrymose accordions of a thousand polka bands. He can suggest, in a rarefied way, Dizzy Gillespie trumpets, Art Tatum runs, celestial choirs, stately big bands. His colors constantly revolve, and you have to move quickly to keep up. Even when he is accompanying Marano on a floating, ad-lib ballad, he turns his sounds over and over, inventing new emotions, filling the cracks that good music never tolerates.

Here is how Marano and Monteiro do Hoagy Carmichael and Johnny Mercer's "Skylark." Monteiro plays an eight-bar introduction, ad lib, using rich chords that seem to spill over, each into the next. He pauses for a resounding beat, and she goes into the famous and ingenious first line: "Skylark"—she sings "Oh-a-a Sky-lark"—"have you anything to say to me?" He plays whispering chords behind her. When, at the end of the first verse, she gets to the words "where someone's waiting to be kissed," he sings softly with her in unison, gently expanding the body of sound. He stops singing, keeps his organ chords going, and starts singing again when she reaches "a valley green with spring" and again at "a blossom-covered lane." She slides into the bridge over windlike chords, and he hums in unison to the chords, and she finishes the first chorus. He solos, using his keyboard for piano and organ effects and his voice for unison humming. He becomes a one-man choir. She returns on the bridge, and he scats softly behind her, then drops into a measure of surprising four-four pizzicato bass, and returns to the ad-lib tempo. Together, they sing the last line of the song, "So, if you see them anywhere, won't you lead me there?" They sing echo fashion. She ends with another melismatic "Skylark," and he, doing a Monteiro, suddenly changes keys, and locks up with a brusque G-major chord.

In a way, Marano and Monteiro began when Mabel Mercer first heard the unknown Monteiro. Though Mercer was never a jazz singer, she nonetheless influenced jazz singers (her just-so phrasing, her subtle rhythmic emphases, her Abba Eban diction), and she had a sharp, tuned jazz ear. Mercer was working at Cleo's on the West Side, and Monteiro was accompanying another singer on Mercer's off nights. She stopped in to hear the singer and was knocked out by Monteiro. She told her old friend Alec Wilder about him, and Wilder, equally wowed, invited him to appear on his National Public Radio show. The mysterious momentum that sweeps the gifted toward the place where they should be was set in motion. Monteiro and Marano had met shortly before the radio show (he sang and accompanied himself on the program, proving that as a solo singer he needed Marano to fill his sails), and not many years later they began working together. Marano and Monteiro are two voices intertwined with a sixty-four-piece orchestra. They are also musical questers. Monteiro explains: "Maybe what I like the most in life is anything a little dangerous: flying, motorcycle racing, car racing, scuba diving—I've done them all, including a plane crash, nothing broken. That and taking things apart to see what makes them work, which is what Nancy and I do. We take songs apart, find out what makes them tick, and put them back together, maybe better." ♦



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PROFILE

SECRETS OF THE MAGUS

Ricky Jay does closeup magic that flouts reality. But, rather than headline in Las Vegas, Jay prefers to live in the mysterious world of ancient mountebanks, eccentric entertainers, and sleight-of-hand artists, whose secrets he preserves with a scholarly passion, and who are his true peers in the realm of illusion.

BY MARK SINGER

THE playwright David Mamet and the theatre director Gregory Mosher affirm that some years ago, late one night in the bar of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Chicago, this happened:

Ricky Jay, who is perhaps the most gifted sleight-of-hand artist alive, was performing magic with a deck of cards. Also present was a friend of Mamet and Mosher's named Christ Nogulich, the director of food and beverage at the hotel. After twenty minutes of disbelief-suspending manipulations, Jay spread the deck face up on the bar counter and asked Nogulich to concentrate on a specific card but not to reveal it. Jay then assembled the deck face down, shuffled, cut it into two piles, and asked Nogulich to point to one of the piles and name his card.

"Three of clubs," Nogulich said, and he was then instructed to turn over the top card.

He turned over the three of clubs.

Mosher, in what could be interpreted as a passive-aggressive act, quietly announced, "Ricky, you know, I also concentrated on a card."

After an interval of silence, Jay said, "That's interesting, Gregory, but I only do this for one person at a time."

Mosher persisted: "Well, Ricky, I really was thinking of a card."

Jay paused, frowned, stared at Mosher, and said, "This is a distinct change of procedure." A longer pause. "All right—what was the card?"

"Two of spades."

Jay nodded, and gestured toward the other pile, and Mosher turned over its top card.

The deuce of spades.

A small riot ensued.

Deborah Baron, a screenwriter in Los Angeles, where Jay lives, once invited him to a New Year's Eve dinner party at her home. About a dozen other people attended. Well past midnight, everyone gathered around a coffee table as Jay, at Baron's request, did closeup card magic. When he had performed several dazzling illusions and seemed ready to retire, a guest named Mort said, "Come on, Ricky. Why don't you do something truly amazing?"

Baron recalls that at that moment "the look in Ricky's eyes was, like, 'Mort—you have just fucked with the wrong person.' "

Jay told Mort to name a card, any card. Mort said, "The three of hearts." After shuffling, Jay gripped the deck in the palm of his right hand and sprung it, cascading all fifty-two cards so that they travelled the length of the table and pelted an open wine bottle.

"O.K., Mort, what was your card again?"

"The three of hearts."

"Look inside the bottle."

Mort discovered, curled inside the neck, the three of hearts. The party broke up immediately.

ONE morning last December, a few days before Christmas, Jay came to see me in my office. He wore a dark-gray suit and a black shirt that was open at the collar, and the colors seemed to match his mood. The most uplifting magic, Jay believes, has a spontaneous, improvisational vigor. Nevertheless, because he happened to be in New York we had made a date to get together, and I, invoking a journalistic imperative, had specifically requested that he come by my office and do some magic while I took notes. He hemmed and hawed and then, reluctantly, consented. Though I had no idea what was in store, I anticipated being completely fooled.

At that point, I had known Jay for two years, during which we had discussed his theories of magic, his relationships with and opinions of other practitioners of the art, his rigid opposition to public revelations of the techniques of magic, and his relentless passion for collecting rare books and manuscripts, art, and other artifacts connected to the history of magic, gambling, unusual entertainments, and frauds and confidence games. He has a skeptically friendly, mildly ironic conversational manner and a droll, filigreed prose style. Jay's collection functions as a working research library. He is the author of dozens of scholarly articles and also of two diverting and richly informative books, "Cards as Weapons" (1977) and "Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women" (1986). For the past several years, he has devoted his energies mainly to scholarship and to acting in and consulting on motion pictures. Though he loves to perform, he is extremely selective about venues and audiences. I've attended lectures and demonstrations by him before gatherings of East Coast undergraduates, West Coast students of the history of magic, and Midwestern bunco-squad detectives. Studying videotapes of him and observing at first hand some of his serendipitous microbursts of legerdemain have taught me how inappropriate it is to say that "Ricky Jay does card tricks"—a characterization as inadequate as "Sonny Rollins plays tenor saxophone" or "Darci Kistler dances." None of my scrutinizing has yielded a shred of insight into how he does what he does. Every routine appears seamless, unparsable, simply magical.

Before getting down to business in

Ricky Jay, opposite, photographed by Richard Avedon in New York City, March 4, 1993.

my office, we chatted about this and that: water spouters and armless origami artists and equestrian bee trainers, all subjects that Jay has written about. As we were talking, an editor friend and two other colleagues dropped by. I had introduced Jay and the editor once before and—presumptuously, it turned out—had mentioned earlier that morning that he would be coming by for a private performance. Politely but firmly, Jay made it plain that an audience of one was what he had in mind. There was an awkward moment after the others left. I apologized for the intrusion, and he apologized for not being more accommodating. He reassured me that he still had something to show me. My cluttered office didn't feel right, however, so we headed upstairs to a lunchroom, found that it was unoccupied, and seated ourselves in a corner booth, facing each other. He unzipped a black leather clutch that he had brought with him and removed a deck of red Bee playing cards imprinted with the logo of Harrah's Casino.

In "Cards as Weapons" Jay refers to Dai Vernon, who died last year, at ninety-eight, as "the greatest living contributor to the magical art," and he quotes Vernon's belief that "cards are like living, breathing human beings and should be treated accordingly." I was reminded of Vernon's dictum as Jay caressed the deck, as gently as if it were a newly hatched chick. He has small hands—just large enough so that a playing card fits within the plane of his palm. There is a slightly raised pad of flesh on the underside of the first joint of each finger. "Not the hands of a man who has done a lot of hard labor," Jay said—a completely disingenuous line, to which he added, "One of the best sleight-of-hand guys I know is a plumber."

Jay's hands seem out of scale with the rest of him. He is of average height but has a hefty, imposing build. During the seventies, he regularly toured with various rock groups as an opening act and could easily have passed as foreman of the road crew; at the time, he had dark-brown hair that reached the middle of his back, and a dense, flowing beard. He now keeps his hair and beard neatly trimmed. He has a fleshy face, a high forehead, and dark eyes. His eyes light up and then crinkle when he laughs—a burst of what might or might not indicate pleasure, followed by a dry, wise-sounding chuckle that could mean anything. His inflection is New York with a Flatbush edge. In three of Mamet's films—"House of Games," "Things Change," and "Homicide"—Jay has been cast to type as a confidence man, a gangster, and an Israeli terrorist, respectively. In one scene of the play within a play of "House of Games," he portrays a menacing professional gambler.

"I'm always saying there's no correlation between gambling and magic," Jay said as he shuffle-cut the cards. "But this is a routine of actual gamblers' techniques within the context of a theatrical magic presentation."

He noticed me watching him shuffling, and asked softly, with deadpan sincerity, "Does that look fair?"

When I said it looked fair, he dealt two hands of five-card draw and told me to lay down my cards. Two pair. Then he laid down his. A straight.

"Was that fair?" he said. "I don't think so. Let's discuss the reason why that wasn't fair. Even though I shuffled openly and honestly, I didn't let you cut the cards. So let's do it again, and this time I'll let you cut the cards."

He shuffled again, I cut the cards, he dealt, and this time I had three tens.

"Ready to turn them over?"

My three-of-a-kind compared unfavorably with his diamond flush.

"Is that fair?" he said again. "I don't think so. Let's talk about why that might not be fair. Even though I shuffled the cards"—he was now reshuffling the deck—"and you cut the cards, you saw me pick up the cards after you cut them, and maybe you think there was some way for me to nullify the cut by sleight of hand. So this time I'll shuffle the cards and you shuffle the cards."

Jay shuffled the deck, I riffle-shuffled the deck and handed it back to him, and he said, "And I'll deal six hands of poker—one for myself and five for you. I'll let you choose any one of the five. And I'll beat you."

He dealt six hands. Instead of revealing only one of my five hands, I turned them all face up.

"Oh, oh," he said. "I see you want to turn them all over. I only intended for you to pick one—but, well, no, that's all right."

The best of my five hands was two pair.

Jay said, "Now, did that seem fair?"

I said yes.

Jay said, "I don't think so," and showed me his cards—four kings.

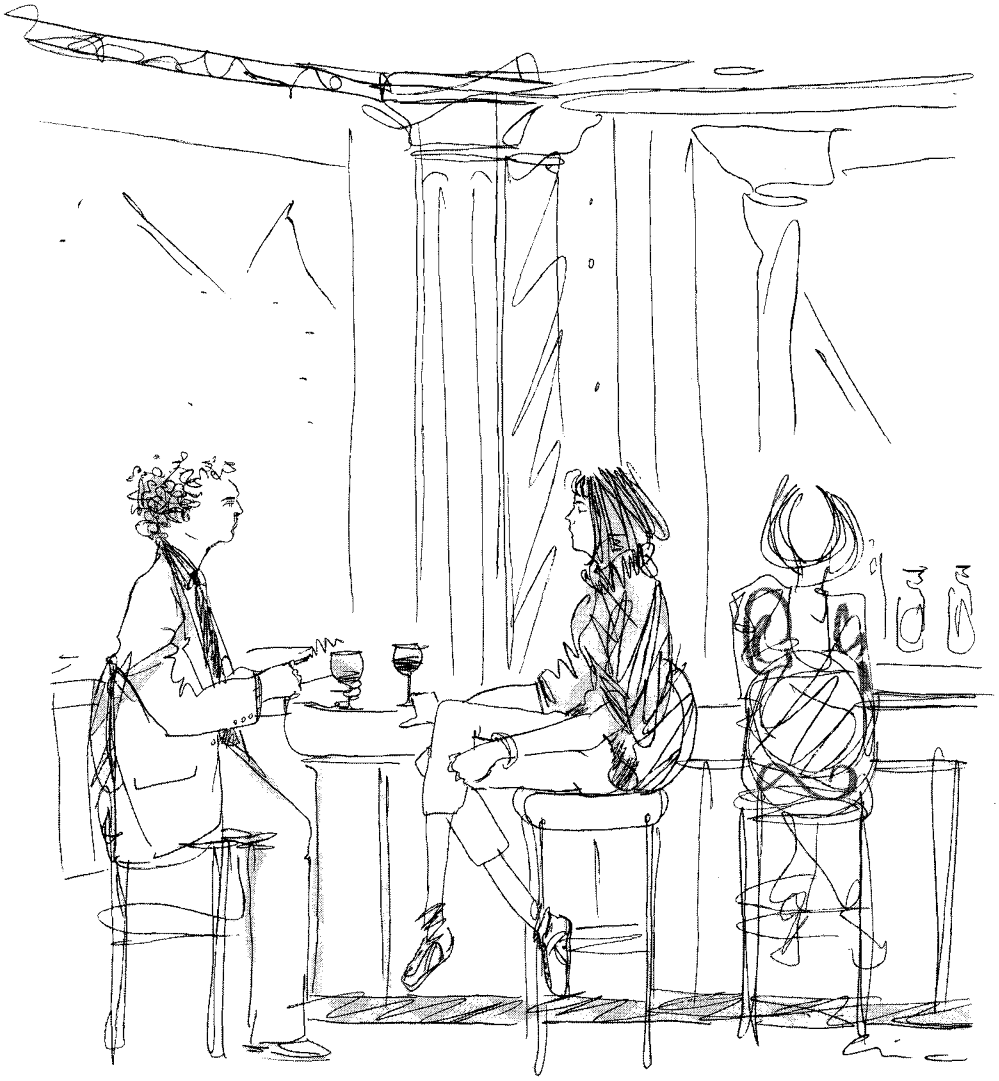
I rested my elbows on the table and massaged my forehead.

"Now, why might that be unfair?" he continued. "I'll tell you why. Because, even though you shuffled, I dealt the cards. That time, I also shuffled the cards. Now, this time you shuffle the cards and you deal the cards. And you pick the number of players. And you designate any hand for me and any hand for you."

After shuffling, I dealt four hands, arranged as the points of a square. I chose a hand for myself and selected one for him. My cards added up to nothing—king-high nothing.

"Is that fair?" Jay said, picking up his cards, waiting a beat, and returning them to the table, one by one—the coup de grâce. "I. Don't. Think. So." One, two, three, four aces.

JAY has an anomalous memory, extraordinarily retentive but riddled with hard-to-account-for gaps. "I'm becoming quite worried about my memory," he said not long ago. "New information doesn't stay. I wonder if it's the NutraSweet." As a child, he read avidly and could summon the title and the author of every book that had passed through his hands. Now he gets lost driving in his own neighborhood, where he has lived for several years—he has no idea how many. He once had a summer job tending bar and doing magic at a place called the Royal Palm, in Ithaca, New York. On a bet, he accepted a mnemonic challenge from a group of friendly patrons. A numbered list of a hundred arbitrary objects was drawn up: No. 3 was "paintbrush," No. 18 was "plush ottoman," No. 25 was "roaring lion," and so on. "Ricky! Sixty-five!" someone would demand, and he had ten seconds to respond correctly or lose a buck. He always won, and, to this day, still would. He is capable of leaving the house wearing his suit jacket but forget-



"Any other political convictions you wish to share, besides having the hots for Dee Dee Myers?"

• •

ting his pants. He can recite verbatim the rapid-fire spiel he delivered a quarter of a century ago, when he was briefly employed as a carnival barker: "See the magician; the fire 'manipulator'; the girl with the yellow e-e-elastic tissue. See Adam and Eve, boy and girl, brother and sister, all in one, one of the world's three living 'morphrodites.' And the e-e-electrode lady . . ." He can quote verse after verse of nineteenth-century Cockney rhyming slang. He says he cannot remember what age he was when his family moved from Brooklyn to the New Jersey suburbs. He cannot recall the year he entered college or the year he left. "If you ask me for specific dates, we're in trouble," he says.

Michael Weber, a fellow-magician and close friend, has said, "Basically, Ricky remembers nothing that happened after 1900."

Jay has many loyal friends, a protective circle that includes a lot of people with show-business and antiquarian-book-collecting connections and remarkably few with magic-world connections.

Marcus McCorison, a former president of the American Antiquarian Society, where Jay has lectured and performed, describes him as "a deeply serious scholar—I think he knows more about the history of American conjuring than anyone else."

Nicolas Barker, who recently retired as one of the deputy keepers of the British Library, says, "Ricky would say you can't be a good conjurer without knowing the history of your profession, because there are no new tricks under the sun, only variations. He's a superbly gifted conjurer, and he's an immensely scholarly person whose knowledge in his chosen field is gigantic, in a class by itself. And, like any other scholarly person, he has a very good working knowledge of fields outside his own."

The actor Steve Martin said not long ago, "I sort of think of Ricky as the intellectual élite of magicians. I've had experience with magicians my whole life. He's expertly able to perform and yet he knows the theory, history, literature of the field. Ricky's a master of his craft. You know how there are those teachers of creative writing who can't necessarily write but can teach? Well, Ricky can actually do everything."

A collector named Michael Zinman says, "He's instantly reachable, up to a limit." Those most familiar with his idiosyncrasies realize that there are at least three Ricky Jays: a public persona, a private persona, and a private persona within the private persona. Jay can remember his age—somewhere in his forties—but says that it is irrelevant. It is also irrelevant that Jay was not his surname at birth; it was his middle name. Janus Cercone, who wrote the screenplay for "Leap of Faith," a recent film that stars Steve Martin as a flimflam faith healer and credits Jay as the "Cons and Frauds Consultant," told me, "I talk to Ricky three times a day. Other than my husband, he's my best friend. I think I know him as well as just about anyone does, and I know less about his background and his childhood than about those of anyone else I know."

Mamet and Jay have been friends for several years—a bond rooted, in part, in their shared fascination with the language, science, and art of cons and frauds.

"I'll call Ricky on the phone," Mamet says. "I'll ask him—say, for something I'm writing—'A guy's wandering through upstate New York in 1802 and he comes to a tavern and there's some sort of mountebank. What would the mountebank be doing?' And Ricky goes to his library and then sends me an entire description of what the mountebank would be doing. Or I'll tell him I'm having a Fourth of July party and I want to do some sort of disappearance in the middle of the woods. He says, 'That's the most bizarre request I've ever heard. You want to do a disappearing effect in the woods? There's nothing like that in the literature. I mean, there's this one 1760 pamphlet—'Jokes, Tricks, Ghosts and Diversions by Woodland, Stream and Campfire.' But, other than that, I can't think of a thing.' He's unbelievably generous. Ricky's one of the world's great people. He's my hero. I've never seen anybody better at what he does."

I once asked Mamet whether Jay had ever shared with him details of his childhood.

Mamet replied, "I can't remember."

I said, "You can't remember whether you discussed it or you can't remember the details?"

He said, "I can't remember whether or not I know a better way to dissuade you from your reiteration of that question without seeming impolite."

Jay's condensed version of his early life goes like this: "I grew up like Athena—covered with playing cards instead of armor—and, at the age of seven, materialized on a TV show, doing magic." Confronted with questions about his parents, he suggests a different topic. Whatever injuries were inflicted, his mother and his father were apparently equally guilty. Any enthusiasm he ever expressed they managed not to share. "I'm probably the only kid in history whose parents made him stop taking music lessons," he says. "They made me stop studying the accordion. And, I suppose, thank God." He loved to play basketball. There was a backboard above the garage of the family house, which had aluminum siding. "Don't dent the house!" his mother routinely warned. His father oiled his hair with Brylcreem and brushed his teeth with Colgate. "He kept his toothpaste in the medicine cabinet and the Brylcreem in a closet about a foot away," Jay recalls. "Once, when I was ten, I switched the tubes. All you need to know about my father is that after he brushed his teeth with Brylcreem he put the toothpaste in his hair."

Though Jay first performed in public at the age of four, he rejects the notion that magic—or, in any case, his mature style of magic—is suitable entertainment for children. Nor does he apologize for his lack of susceptibility to the charms of children themselves. I once drove with him from central Massachusetts to my home, near New York City. We had to catch a plane together the next day, and I had invited him to spend the night in a spare room, on a floor above and beyond earshot of my three sons. While acknowledging that they were Ricky Jay fans, I promised him that they would all be in bed by the time we arrived and off to school before he awoke the next morning. As it turned out, we had no sooner entered the house than I heard one of my six-year-old twins announce "I think Ricky's here!" Before he could remove his coat, the three of them, all in their pajamas, had him cornered in the kitchen. My eleven-year-old son handed him a deck of cards. The other boys began parroting the monologue from one of his television appearances—patter from a stunt in which he tosses a playing card like a boomerang and during its return flight bisects it with a pair of giant scissors. Jay gave me the same look I imagine he gave Mort, the unfortunate New Year's Eve party guest. I immediately reached for the phone directory and found the number of a nearby motel.

Just as resolutely as he avoids children, Jay declines opportunities to perform for other magicians. This habit has earned him a reputation for aloofness, to which he pleads guilty-with-an-explanation. According to Michael Weber, he has a particular aversion to the "magic lumpen"—hoi polloi who congregate in magic clubs and at conventions, where they unabashedly seek to expropriate each other's secrets, meanwhile failing to grasp the critical distinction between doing tricks and creating a sense of wonder. One guy in a tuxedo producing doves can be magic, ten guys producing doves is a travesty. "Ricky won't perform for magicians at magic shows, because they're interested in things," Weber says. "They don't get it. They won't watch him and be inspired to make magic of their own. They'll be inspired to do that trick that belongs to Ricky. Magic is not about someone else sharing the newest secret. Magic is about working hard to discover a secret and making something out of it. You start with some small principle and you build a theatrical presentation out of it. You do something that's technically artistic that creates a

COWS

Trochee, trochee, trochee—that's how
I heard them, the cows,
their beings, they walked
like that into the barn each night
and out again each morning
after giving up their milk.
They were always eating, their heads down,
in field or barn,
eating grass or grain.
The field short-cropped, lunar,
dotted with rocks,
cow pies. Out of thirty, maybe three
or four you gave names
to: Bossy, Bessy. They were stupid,
not cute, and would not love or nuzzle you.
They went out in the morning and came back at dusk.
They didn't just hand it over,
their milk, but you could take it from them,
great foamy pails
emptied into vats
and sold for cash, all but one large blue pitcherful,
which stayed home,
and which, when it was cold,
you poured atop a bowl of oatmeal
and ate through a thousand winters, every day
safe, tame, broken, and gone.

—Thomas Lux

small drama. There are two ways you can expand your knowledge—through books and by gaining the confidence of fellow-magicians who will explain these things. Ricky to a large degree gets his information from books—old books—and then when he performs for magicians they want to know, 'Where did that come from?' And he's appalled that they haven't read this stuff. So there's this large body of magic lumpen who really don't understand Ricky's legacy—his contribution to the art, his place in the art, his technical proficiency and creativity. They think he's an élitist and a snob."

Jay does not regard "amateur" as a pejorative. His two most trusted magician confidants are Persi Diaconis, a professor of mathematics at Harvard, and Steve Freeman, a corporate comptroller who lives in Ventura, California. Both are world-class sleight-of-hand artists, and neither ever performs for pay. Jay extolls them as "pure amateurs in the best sense." The distinction that matters to Jay is between "good" magic and "bad." Magic "gives me more pleasure and more pain than anything else I've ever dealt with," he says. "The pain is bad magicians ripping off good ones, doing magic badly, and making a mockery of the art." One specific locale that he steers clear of is the Hollywood Magic Castle, a club whose membership consists of both amateur and professional conjurers. On a given night, one can see a great performer at the Magic Castle, but all too often the club is a tepid swamp of gossip, self-congratulation, and artistic larceny—a place where audiences who don't know better are frequently fed a bland diet of purloined ineptitude. Many years ago, Jay had an encounter there that he describes as typical.

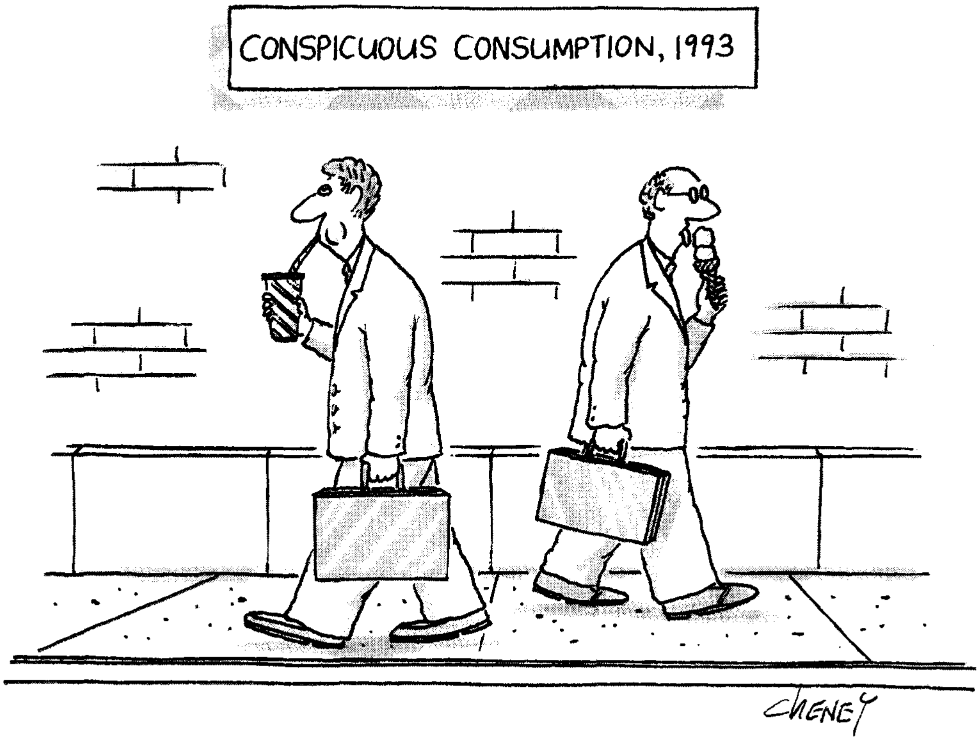
"A guy comes up and starts telling me he's a fan," he recalls. "I say thank you, that's nice to hear. He says he used to see me perform in Boulder, Colorado. That's nice, too, I say. Then he starts talking about this wonderful piece I did with a mechanical monkey—really one of the most bizarre routines I ever worked out—and I thank him, and he says, 'Yeah, I get a tremendous response when I do that. Audiences just love it.' And I say, 'Let me ask you something. Suppose I invite you over to my house for dinner. We have a pleasant meal, we talk about magic, it's an enjoyable evening. Then, as you're about to leave, you walk into my living room and you pick up my television and walk out with it. You steal my television set. Would you do that?' He says, 'Of course not.' And I say, 'But you already did.' He says, 'What are you talking about?' I say, 'You stole my television!' He says, 'How can you say that? I've never even been to your house.' This guy doesn't even know what a metaphor is. People ask me why I don't do lectures at magic conventions, and I say, 'Because I'm still learning.' Meanwhile, you've got people who have been doing magic for ten months and they are actually out there pontificating. It's absurd."

T. A. Waters, a mentalist and writer, who is the librarian at the Magic Castle, told me, "Some magicians, once they learn how to do a trick without dropping the prop on their foot, go ahead and perform in public. Ricky will work on a routine a couple of years before even showing anyone. One of the things that I love about Ricky is his continued amazement at how little magicians seem to care about the art. Intellectually, Ricky seems to understand this, but emotionally he can't accept it. He gets as upset about this problem today as he did twenty years ago."

At some point within the past twenty years, Jay asked Dai Vernon—a.k.a. the Professor—how he coped with affronts of this sort, and Vernon replied, "I forced myself not to care."

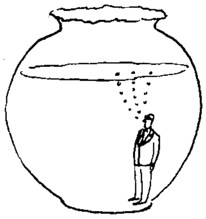
"Maybe that's how he lived to be ninety-eight years old," Jay says.

Jay's admirers invariably dwell upon his technical mastery—what is known in the trade as "chops." According to Diaconis, he is, "simply put, one of the half-dozen best card handlers in the world. Not maybe; everybody thinks so." Diaconis and Jay were casual acquaintances as kids on the New York magic scene during the fifties, then lost track of each other for several years, in part because Jay deliberately exiled himself from the mainstream magic world. They reëstablished contact twenty-odd years ago, after Diaconis caught one of Jay's appearances on the "Tonight Show." By then, Jay had honed an out-of-left-field brand of gonzo-hip comedy magic, a combination of chops and antic irreverence. Often, he would begin a performance by demonstrating a not easily marketable skill that eventually earned him a listing in the "Guinness Book of World Records": throwing a playing card for distance. A properly launched card would go ninety miles an hour. Unobstructed, it could travel a hundred and ninety feet. From ten paces, it could pierce the outer rind of a watermelon. After impaling the flesh of a watermelon with a card, Jay would rifle one card after another into the exact same spot. He also used a plastic chicken and windup



toys as props and targets, often inflicting disabling injuries. His patter was voluble, embroidered with orotund, baroque locutions; he would describe the watermelon rind, for instance, as the “thick pachydermatous outer melon layer.”

In a memorable routine, the “Laughing Card Trick,” which involved no words at all, Jay showed his hands empty and then produced cards one at a time, along the way building suspense with cackling laughter. Each time he produced a card—somehow, it was always a jack of spades—he gripped it with his lips. After doing this maneuver four times, he removed the cards from his mouth and revealed that—voilà!—they had become the four aces. Next, he would do spirit-writing on a tortilla. Downshifting, he would segue to “The Four Queens,” a minuetlike Victorian parable in which the four face cards representing “the feminine portion of the smart set” were “besieged” by “suitors from the lower orders.” In other words, each of the four queens was grouped with three numbered cards. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he would announce, “as you have seen, I have taken advantage of these tenderly nurtured and unsophisticated young ladies by placing them in positions extremely galling to their aristocratic sensibilities.” Somehow, the queens must “find each other's company”—that is, transport themselves so that what remained would be three groups of four numbered cards and a quartet of queens. This Jay accomplished in a manner so simple, natural, and miraculous as to render prestidigitation invisible, thereby raising the strong possibility of divine intervention.



Jules Fisher, the theatrical-lighting designer and a friend of Jay's, told me, “Ricky will look into any effect and find the side of it that is inherently magical. He doesn't present magic as a challenge—as a matter of ‘Look, I can make this disappear and you can't.’ Rather, he wraps it in a dramatic plot. In many of his tricks, there are stories. In ‘The Four Queens,’ the cards take on personas, which is much more impressive than the question of how that card disappeared.”

Michael Weber has a vivid memory of seeing Jay execute “The Four Queens” fifteen years ago on a network-television special with Doug Henning as host. “It was a transcendent moment in popular magic,” he says. “Ricky had attitude, presentation, humor, and chops. Everybody was talking about that show. It was one of those times when all the elements of his talent were so self-evidently on display that even the people who could never before get it finally got it.” Dai Vernon once saw Jay perform “The Four Queens” live, during a lecture-demonstration at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, at the University of California at Los Angeles. Afterward, the Professor told his disciple that the entire performance “restored dignity to the art of magic.”

“The magical aspect of Ricky is very strong,” Diaconis says. “It's one thing to see someone who is very skillful with cards and quite another to witness an effect and have just no idea what happens. With Ricky, it's very hard to isolate technique from performance. I can sense when a sleight has happened and *how it happened*, but I *still* don't see it. I just feel it intellectually. When Ricky is doing one of his poetical pieces, he's working in his own unique venue. He's mixing disparate things—quirky scholarship, iconoclasm, technique, a good story—into some soup that works. Because he picks good, strong tricks and makes them come to life, in the end there's this basic simplicity about what he does. Before Ricky came along, there had been comedy magicians, but never ones who really fooled people. And you can see the consequence—there are a dozen people now working in night clubs doing Ricky Jay acts. But none of them are Ricky Jay.”

IN “Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women” Jay devotes a chapter to “Max Malini: The Last of the Mountebanks.” Malini, who was born in 1873, stood five feet two, had short arms and unusually small hands, dressed like a dandy, spoke English with a comically heavy Eastern European accent, and was celebrated as the most astonishing sleight-of-hand artist of his day. He performed all over the world, for Presidents, prime ministers, robber barons, emperors, kings, and Al Capone. Jay quotes Nate Leipzig, “a master exponent of pure magic technique” and a contemporary of Malini's: “I would give up everything I know in magic just to get the reaction Malini does from vanishing a single coin.” At a dinner party where Dai Vernon was present, Malini borrowed a female guest's hat, spun a half-dollar on the table, and covered it with the hat, which he then lifted to reveal not the coin but a block of ice. Though Vernon knew ahead of time that this effect would be performed, he later reported that Malini, who had remained at the table throughout the meal, “fooled the hell out of me.” Jay recounts this and other Malini anecdotes with a mixture of delight and wistfulness. In a just universe, he seems to imply, he himself would have been in Leipzig's and Vernon's shoes, playing to the same discerning audiences that witnessed Malini's exemplary talents. He writes, “Malini was rarely featured on music hall or theatre stages, even though he performed in the heyday of the great illusionists. Yet far more than Malini's contemporaries, the famous conjurers Herrmann, Kellar, Thurston, and Houdini, Malini was the embodiment of what a magician should be—not a performer who requires a fully equipped stage, elaborate apparatus, elephants, or handcuffs to accomplish his mysteries, but one who can stand a few inches from you and with a borrowed coin, a lemon, a knife, a tumbler, or a pack of cards convince you he performs miracles.”

Jay feels connected to Malini not only out of veneration but by a strange coincidence. Malini, who was born in a small town on the Polish-Austrian border, had the given name of Max Katz (or, perhaps, Max Katz-Breit). Max Katz was also the name of Jay's maternal grandfather, a well-to-do accountant and, most important, the one member of the family who loved and appreciated Ricky and for whom Ricky in return felt love and gratitude. “My grandfather was an amateur acquisitor of skill and knowledge,” Jay says. “He was interested in a lot of things—pool, chess, checkers, calligraphy, cryptography, origami, magic. His philosophy was to take lessons from the best available people and then proceed on his own. He was really a terrific teacher. And his greatest contribution was to expose me to the best. Because of him, I was able to see on a regular basis the finest closeup-magic people in the world. Unlike me, he actually liked to

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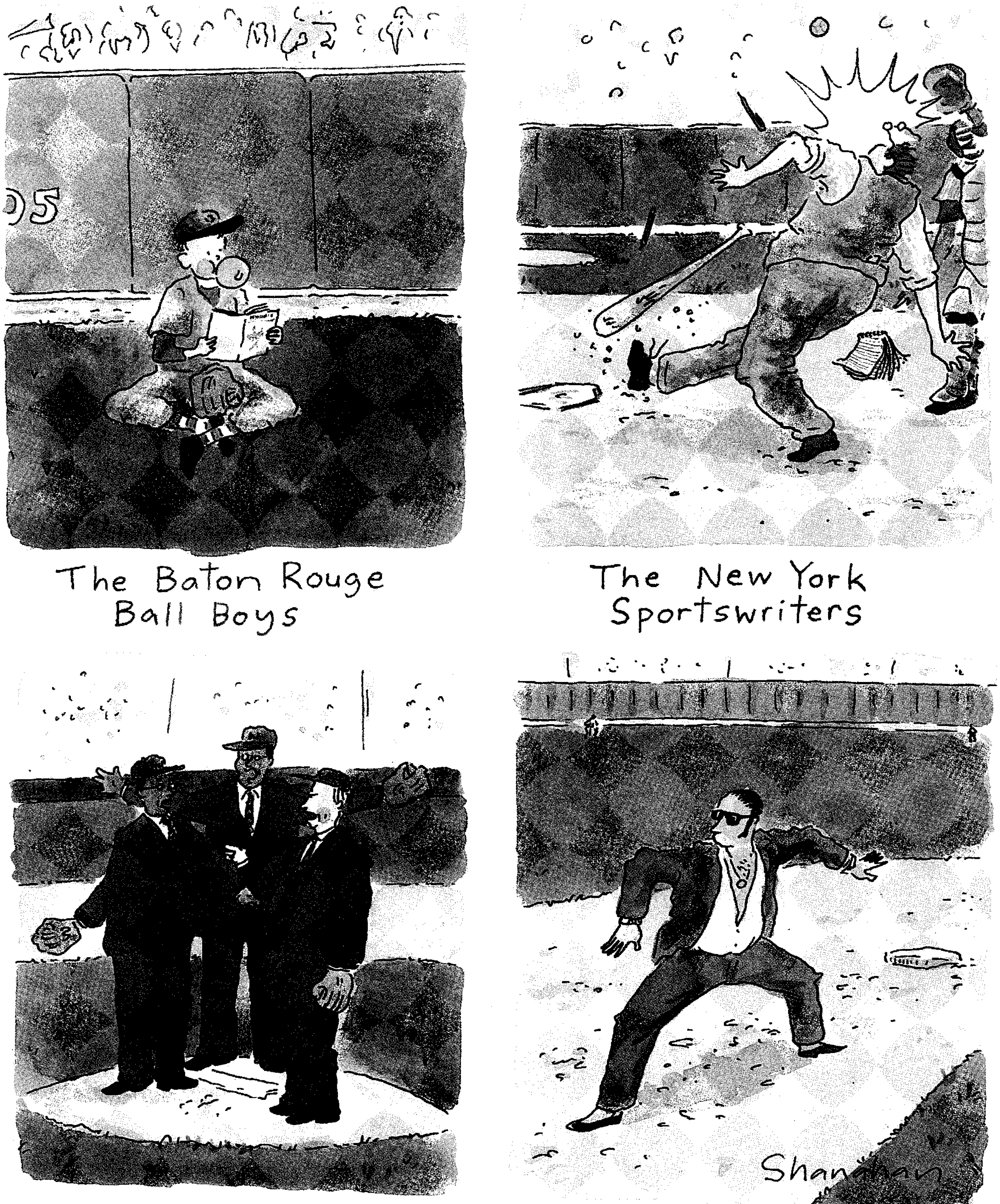
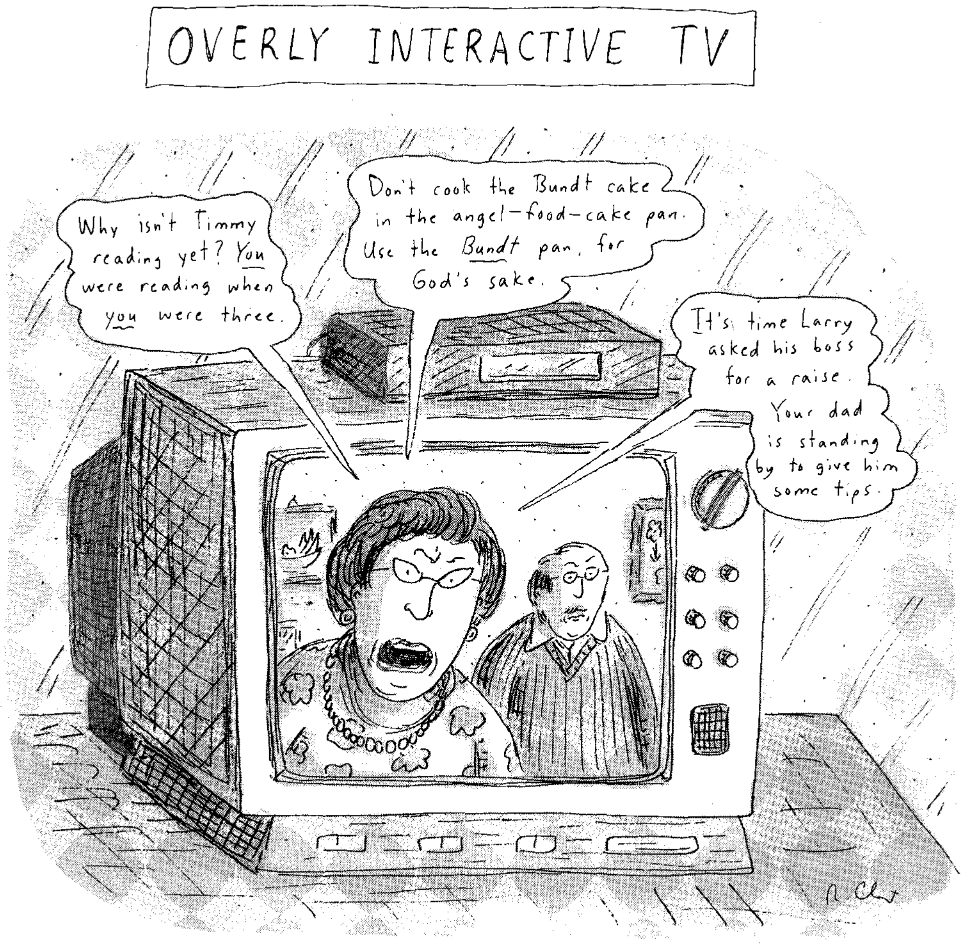


The Baton Rouge Ball Boys

The New York Sportswriters

The Washington Arbitrators

The Las Vegas Oddsmakers


OVERLY INTERACTIVE TV
Why isn't Timmy reading yet? You were reading when you were three.
Don't cook the Bundt cake in the angel-food-cake pan. Use the Bundt pan, for God's sake.
It's time Larry asked his boss for a raise. Your dad is standing by to give him some tips.

fraternize with magicians." At one time, Katz was president of the Society of American Magicians. When, at the age of four, Ricky did his first trick in front of an audience—he multiplied paper coffee creamers during a backyard barbecue for the Society of American Magicians—Dai Vernon was a witness.

Jay told me, "When we watched Vernon, my grandfather would say, 'Look at the Professor and study the naturalness with which he handles objects.' He introduced me to Slydini and to Francis Carlyle, two other great closeup illusionists. These were guys who were capable of doing magic—something beyond tricks—and the fact that they were stylistically so different from each other fascinated me. With Slydini, it was important to understand that he was the master of misdirection—drawing the spectator's attention away from the sleight. With Carlyle, the purpose was to absorb what my grandfather called the clarity of instruction—how Carlyle subtly guided the spectator in a way that enhanced the clarity of the effect. There was a period of several years when I took formal lessons with Slydini. In his stage appearances, which were infrequent, he used to perform in a toreador suit, and he made one for me. I wore it with my hair slicked back, and I had these fake sideburns pencilled in. I performed with doves. I did a piece called 'The Floating Cane'—stage-illusion work, with no patter, that eventually made me realize I wanted to speak and I preferred closeup. An audition was arranged for me for 'The Ed Sullivan Show.' I wore my toreador suit and wanted to pretend I was Spanish, knowing it would increase my chances of getting on the show, but my parents wouldn't let me. By then, I had already done a lot of television. When I was five, I was supposed to appear on 'Startime Kids,' with Ed Herlihy, but I dozed during the dress rehearsal and slept through the show. I was on a program called 'Time for Pets' when I was seven. I was the youngest magician who had ever been on TV. I was awful. I was a kid. The only thing that's important is that I was very comfortable performing. I was supposed to produce a rabbit, but they couldn't find one, so I had to work with a guinea pig, which took a leak on my father's necktie. My father said, 'Perfect. You get all the glory and I get all the piss.' "

Weekends, Jay often made trips to Manhattan, first in the company of his grandfather and by adolescence often on his own. The cafeteria on the ground floor of the Wurlitzer Building, on West Forty-second Street, was to the magic demimonde what the White Horse Tavern was to literary pretenders. Jay also spent many contented hours at Al Flosso's magic shop, on West Thirty-fourth Street. He preferred Flosso's to the more popular Tannen's, which was then in Times Square, because, above all, he loved Flosso. Also, the marvellous clutter of old posters, handbills, and books appealed to him far more than the antiseptic ambience of Tannen's. "Early on, I knew I didn't want to do the kind of magic other people were doing," he says. "So I started buying old books to look for material." Flosso, in the guise of a sideshow pitchman from Coney Island, did wonderful comedy sleight of hand and had a flourishing career—in the big rooms at Grossinger's and the Concord, on the Sullivan show. When Ricky's parents asked what kind of bar-mitzvah celebration he wanted, he said he wanted Flosso to perform. "The thing that's significant about that event is that it's literally the only warm memory I have of my parents," he has said.

Prodded by Slydini and his grandfather, he entered several performing competitions at magic conventions. "I always won," he says. "But the whole thing soured me on the idea of competitions within an art." By the time he was fifteen, he had had enough of living at home. He moved in with a friend's family, moved back home again, moved to the resort town of Lake George, in upstate New York (where he discovered what it was like to support himself as a pro), and, before he turned eighteen, had left home for good. He either did or did not officially complete high school—another one of those elusive memories. Max Katz died around that time. At the funeral, Flosso ceremonially broke a wand and placed it in the casket—"the single most frightening thing I ever saw," Jay says. His grandfather's death marked the end of his relationship with his parents. (He remains on good terms with his younger sister, whom he says he admires tremendously.) By then, he was living in Illinois, having begun a peripatetic college career. Over a period of ten years, he attended five different colleges and "officially was never anything other than a freshman." At Cornell, he enrolled in the School of Hotel Management. "In case I had my own joint in Vegas, I thought I might be the only guy in the business who would know how to get around in both the casino and the kitchen," he likes to say. He and several friends formed an a-cappella doo-wop group called Chico and the Deaf Tones. The Deaf Tones were five guys named Tony plus a girl named Laura. Their big number was "Tell Laura I Love Her."

To pay tuition and otherwise make ends meet, he briefly sold encyclopedias, travelled with a carnival, worked on Wall Street as an accountant, tended bar, and, of course, did magic. From talking to Jay's friends, I gathered that there was a time when he played cards for a living. Boldly, I once raised this subject with him, and he pretended not to hear me.

"Would anybody play cards with you today?" I asked.

"Sure," he said. "Silly people."

Twice while he was still at Cornell, he appeared on the "Tonight Show." With Ithaca as his home base, he became nomadic. He performed frequently in Aspen and Lake George, did club and concert dates all over the country with various rock and jazz groups—Ike and Tina Turner, the Chambers Brothers, Leon Redbone, Al Jarreau, Emmylou Harris, Herbie Hancock, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. Sometimes he was the opening act, sometimes he was the headliner. Invitations to perform in Europe materialized. In the early seventies, he moved to Los Angeles and found plenty of work, first at a club in Santa Monica called McCabe's Guitar Shop and then at the Magic Castle. Tracy Newman, a television-comedy writer, who lived with him for a year, says she went to see him perform "probably seventeen times" before they started dating. Not long ago, she told me, "The thing Ricky had that I'd never before seen in a magician was charm. At McCabe's, he was doing improvisational patter. He had his stuff down so well he was just free. He had the guts to bring people onstage and really play with them, instead of having to be so careful that they might see something that would cause him to blow what he was trying to do. He was very casual, but his language had a Shakespearean feel. He was brutal with hecklers—not because it would throw him off. He just didn't like hecklers. He vaporized them."

In those days, Dai Vernon had a sinecure at the Magic Castle that entitled him to living quarters nearby. Vernon's presence was the main thing that had attracted Jay to Los Angeles. When he was not on the road, he sought out the Professor's company virtually every night. Wherever they started the evening—at the Castle or somewhere else—they would invariably wind up at Canter's Deli, on Fairfax Avenue, a shrine of vinyl and Formica and leaden matzo balls. There Vernon would hold forth until five or six in the morning. A few years ago, Jay wrote a magazine article in which he described one such session at Canter's, an occasion when he petitioned for practical counsel rather than the generous praise that Vernon typically dispensed:

> "Professor," I protested, "I really want to know how I can improve my technique and performance. I want to take lessons from you. I really want advice."
>
> Vernon smiled his patented half smile, and with a delicate movement of his eyes beckoned me closer. I leaned forward with anticipation, almost unable to contain my excitement, about to receive my benediction from the master. "You want advice, Ricky," he said. "I'll give you advice. Fuck as many different women as you can. Not the same one. Not the same one. Fuck many different women. Many different women."

Persi Diaconis ran away from his unhappy home at the age of fourteen and spent two years travelling with Vernon—an unsentimental education. "Life with Vernon was a challenge," Diaconis says. "Vernon would use secrecy as a way of torturing you. When he and I were on the road, he woke up one morning and said, 'You know, I've been thinking about sleight of hand my whole life, and I think I now know how to encapsulate it in one sentence.' And then, of course, he refused to tell me." Another friend of Vernon's once said, "I wouldn't have taken a million dollars not to have known him. But I'd give a million not to know another one like him."

Vernon was extroverted, insouciant, a winning combination of gentleman and rake. Though he perfectly fitted the role of guru, he was not the paternal mentor that Jay's grandfather had been. To the extent that anyone could fill that void, Charlie Miller did. "Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women," which Jay spent ten years writing, is dedicated "to my wonderful friend Charles Earle Miller, a unique, eccentric, and remarkable entertainer." Had Miller not been Vernon's contemporary, Jay believes, he would have been regarded as the greatest sleight-of-hand figure of his time. "For fifty or sixty years, Charlie lived in Vernon's shadow," he says. "And yet Vernon knew that Charlie was the best sleight-of-hand artist he'd ever seen." Vernon once described Miller as "unquestionably the most skillful exponent of the magic art it has ever been my pleasure to know." Miller was a shy, vulnerable man, for whom public performance was a bravura act. As a friend to Jay, Diaconis, Steve Freeman, and another accomplished magician, John Thompson—his four most reverent acolytes—he was emotionally much warmer than Vernon. "Vernon was very comfortable to be around," Freeman says. "But Charlie was your pal, Charlie was your uncle, Charlie cared about you." On the West Coast, he was the premier cruise-ship performer, and this arrangement suited his essentially rootless nature. (Jay himself worked very few cruise ships—a merciful policy, he says, because "the people who went on cruises had saved up their entire lives just to get on a boat and be away from people who looked like me.") For Vernon, Jay says, "making money was only a means of allowing him to sit in a hotel room and think about his art, about cups and balls and coins and cards." Charlie Miller was, if anything, more cerebral, even more obsessive.

"Charlie and Vernon were both magicians for magicians," says Robert Lund, the founder of the American Museum of Magic, in Marshall, Michigan. "Only magicians truly appreciated what Charlie was doing. Charlie knew more about why you do it this way instead of that way than anyone I've ever met in my life, including Ricky Jay. If there were a hundred ways of doing an effect—a card trick or sawing a lady in half—Charlie went through all hundred and analyzed each one, looking for the most natural way of doing it, the approach that would be the most palatable and acceptable to an audience."

More than any other magician Jay has known, Miller had an orthodox devotion to preserving the secrets of the art—a fundamental precept that Jay today shares with Diaconis and Freeman. To their dismay, Vernon wrote a series of instruction books. When these began to appear in print, Diaconis said to Vernon, "Why did you publish these, Professor? We don't want the animals using tools." As a palliative, they can speculate about the secrets that Miller took to the grave—an absolutism that, while perhaps depriving him of mundane celebrity, at least made the secrets themselves immortal. "Charlie would never tell anything to anybody who wasn't really on the inside," Diaconis says. "There's something called the Sprong shift. Sprong was a night watchman—he did that for a living so that he could spend his days practicing card handling. The Sprong shift is a certain way of reversing the cards so that a card that would be in the middle will end up on top. It's a move that has been passed down only orally. It's never been described or even hinted at in writing that such a thing existed. It got disseminated to three or five of us, and the one who does it beautifully is Ricky. Charlie had the capacity to watch Ricky practice it for several hours non-stop. He'd keep moving around the room to see it from every possible angle."

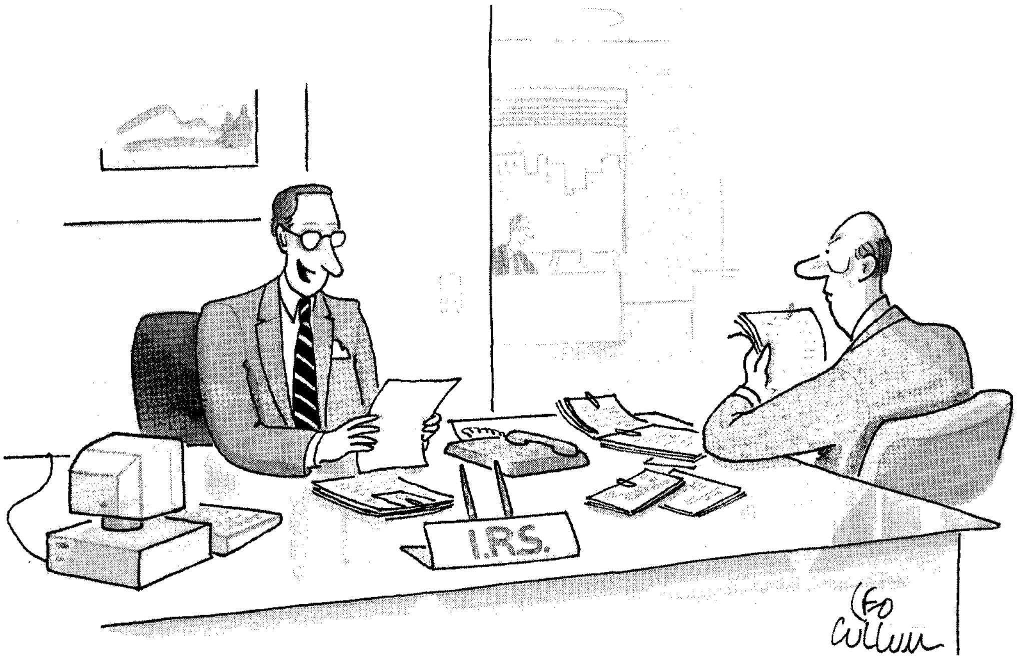
After both Vernon and Miller died, there were memorial services at the Magic Castle—events that Jay refused to attend, because, he said to Freeman, "most of those people didn't know anything about Vernon and Charlie."

"I now say that keeping secrets is my single most important contribution to magic," Diaconis says. "Listen, I have lots of things I won't tell Ricky about. It's pretty hard for us to fool each other. Several years ago, he borrowed my deck and had me pick a card. Then he told me to reach into my left trousers pocket and there was the card I'd picked. For half an hour, I was as badly fooled as I've ever been. In order for him to bring that about, he had to take dead aim at me. That's a phrase we use in discussing the big con: taking dead aim—deeply researching somebody's habits."

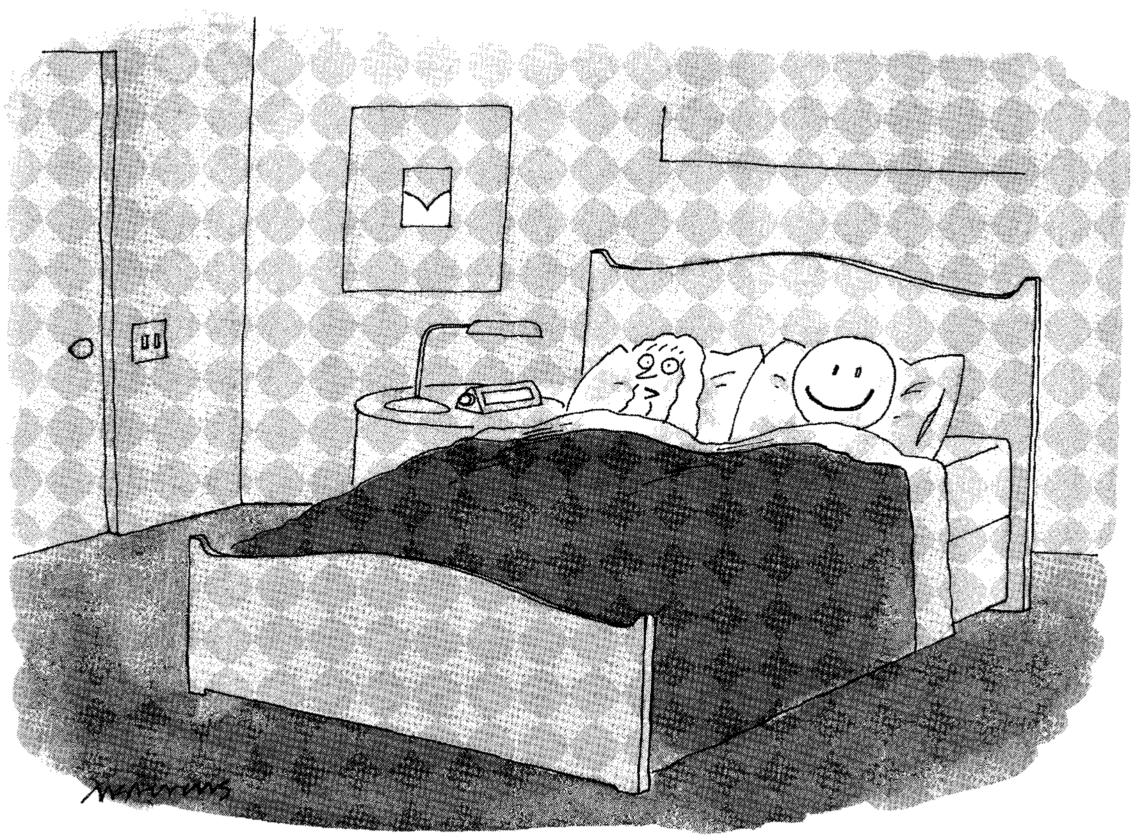
Jay once subjected Freeman to an equally unsettling experience. "I walked into Ricky's apartment one day, and I was wearing a shirt that Charlie Miller had given to Ricky and that Ricky had left at my house," Freeman says. "I was returning it, but, just for fun, I had put it on. I took the shirt off, and Ricky said, 'Oh, just leave it on the back of that chair.' Then we started talking for a while and he said he wanted to show me a new trick. He spread the deck face up and told me to point to a card. I did, and then I gathered and shuffled and dealt them face up. There were only fifty-one. I didn't see my card. And he said, 'Oh, well, go over and look in the pocket of that shirt over there.' And the card was in the shirt pocket. It takes a lot of knowledge about people to be able to do something like that. Ricky was enormously satisfied. Did I figure it out? Well, I was very fooled at the time. I felt stupid, but it was nice to be fooled. That's not a feeling we get to have very often anymore."

VICTORIA DAILEY, who, along with her former husband, William Dailey, deals in rare books from a shop on Melrose Avenue, in Los Angeles, likes to refer to Jay as "our worst customer." She hastens to point out, "He could be our best customer. He wants everything but can hardly buy anything." Both Daileys regard Jay as "a true eccentric" in the English sense—part Bloomsbury, part Fawlty Towers. More than fifteen years ago, they sold Jay the first book for which he paid more than a hundred dollars. The first time he spent more than a thousand dollars for a book, and, again, when he reached the five-thousand-dollar threshold, the Daileys were also involved. The latter item was Jean Prévost's "La Première Partie des Subtiles et Plaisantes Inventions," the earliest known important conjuring book, printed in Lyons in 1584.

"I bought it unhesitatingly," recalls Jay, for whom possession of the Prévost is a bittersweet memory; uncharacteristically, he parted with it during a fiscal crisis.



"It was Socrates, wasn't it, who said, 'The unexamined life is not worth living'?"



"It was good for me, too, dear."

• •

"I bought it and then, with remarkable rapidity, three particular jobs that I thought I had went sour. One was a Johnny Carson special on practical jokes that didn't pan out because of one of his divorces. Another was a tour of Australia that was cancelled by a natural disaster—in other words, by an act of God. This book was so fucking rare that people in the magic world just didn't know about it."

It is the Daileys' impression—a perception shared by other dealers in rare books and incunabula—that Jay spends a higher proportion of his disposable income on rare books and artifacts than anyone else they know. His friend Janus Cercone has described him as "an incunable romantic."

"Probably, no matter how much money he had, he would be overextended bibliomaniacally—or should the word be 'bibliographically'? Anyway, he'd be overextended," William Dailey has said. "The first time I met him, I recognized him as a complete bibliomaniac. He's not a complete monomaniac about books on magic, but within that field he is remarkably focussed. His connoisseurship is impeccable, in that he understands the entire context of a book's emergence. He's not just interested in the book's condition. He knows who printed it, and he knows the personal struggle the author went through to get it printed."

In 1971, during Jay's nomadic phase, he spent a lot of time in Boston hanging out with Diaconis, who had begun to assemble a library of rare magic books. Diaconis takes credit for explicating the rudiments of collecting to Jay and animating his academic interest. He now regards Jay as "ten standard deviations out, just the best in the world in his knowledge of the literature of conjuring." Jay's collection—several thousand volumes, plus hundreds of lithographs, playbills, pamphlets, broadsides, and miscellaneous ephemera—reflects his interest not only in magic but also in gambling, cheating, low life, and what he described in the subtitle of "Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women" as "unique, eccentric and amazing entertainers: stone eaters, mind readers, poison resisters, daredevils, singing mice, etc., etc., etc., etc." Though Jay abhors the notion of buying books as investments, his own collection, while it is not for sale and is therefore technically priceless, more or less represents his net worth. There was a time, within the past decade, when he seriously considered becoming a bookdealer himself. The main thing that dissuaded him, he says, is that "I wouldn't want to sell a book to a philistine, which is what every bookseller has to do." Unlike a lot of collectors, he actually reads and rereads the books and other materials he buys, and puts them to scholarly and performing use. Therefore, he has no trouble rationalizing why he, rather than someone else who might turn up at an auction or peruse a dealer's catalogue, is more worthy of owning, say, both variant editions of "A Synopsis of the Butchery of the Late Sir Washington Irving Bishop (Kamilimilianalani), a most worthy Mason of the thirty-second degree, the Mind Reader and philanthropist, by Eleanor Fletcher Bishop, His Broken Hearted Mother," Philadelphia, 1889 and 1890.

One day last spring, I got a phone call from Jay, who had just returned to Los Angeles from Florida, where he and Michael Weber spent several months doing "pyromagical effects" on a movie called "Wilder Napalm."

"There's a pile of mail on my desk," he said.

"I hope there are a few checks in it," I said.

"Yes, actually, there are. But, of course, I just spent it all on a book."

The book in question was Thomas Ady's "A Candle in the Dark: Or a Treatise Concerning the Nature of Witches and Witchcraft," which includes an important seventeenth-century account of an English magic performance. I had once heard Jay allude to "A Candle in the Dark" during a lecture at the Huntington Library, in San Marino, California. The Huntington owned a copy, and so did a few other institutions. Jay described it to me as "exceedingly rare—only one copy has been sold in my collecting lifetime," and said that he had acquired his from a New York dealer "after a long negotiation." On a subsequent visit to New York, he took me to meet the dealer, Steve Weissman, a preternaturally relaxed fellow, who was obviously quite fond of him.

"We have a common interest," Weissman, who does business out of an office on the East Side, said. "We do like the same kinds of books. I don't specialize in Ricky's area of interest—only Ricky does—but I find that I gravitate toward it. My stock is dominantly literary. And I like oddball subjects: slang dictionaries, magic, gambling, con games. The advantage for me with Ricky is that he's an enthusiast for a wide range of subjects. Most customers arrive and they're entering the dealer's world, my world. He walks in and I enter his world. The next customer through the door might be a Byron fanatic and I'll have to enter *his* world. It's not a unique situation, but with Ricky it's particularly gratifying, because of the kind of collector he is—passionate and knowledgeable. Ideally, I would also include rich in that equation, but he doesn't qualify."

Referring to "A Candle in the Dark," Weissman added, "I don't doubt that I could have sold it for more money to someone else. But it's more fun to sell it to Ricky."

A young man with a ponytail and peach-fuzzy sideburns and wearing a herringbone-tweed topcoat entered the shop. As he closed the door behind him, the doorknob fell off. He picked it up and handed it to Weissman's assistant and said, "I think this is yours."

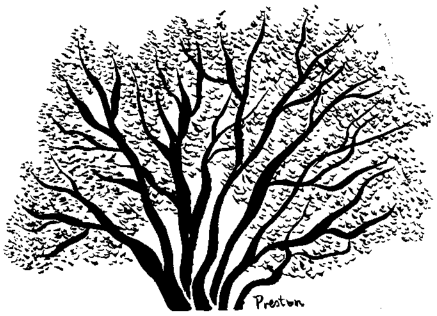
Sotto voce, Jay said, "Who is that guy?"

"I think he's someone who's trying to swindle us into buying a Visa card, or something," Weissman said.

When the young man was ready to leave, a few minutes later, the doorknob had been reattached but would not turn. Twenty minutes elapsed before we were finally rescued by an upstairs neighbor who was able to open the door from the outside. While we waited, before our liberation seemed certain, Jay gestured at the wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling shelves of rare books and said, "To most people this would be hell. But to me it's just a holiday."

Several years ago, Weissman attended an auction at Christie's and, bidding on behalf of Jay and Nicolas Barker, of the British Library, bought a collection of rare engravings whose subject matter was calligraphy. Jay writes in a stylized calligraphic script, and Barker, having spent much of his professional life cataloguing and studying antiquarian manuscripts, confesses to being "passionately interested in the history of handwriting." There were more than thirty items in the auction lot, and Jay and Barker divided them according to a simple formula. "I kept all the images related to armless calligraphers," Jay says, "and Nicolas got all the calligraphers with arms."

In a chapter of "Learned Pigs" entitled "More Than the Sum of Their Parts," Jay recounts the skills and accomplishments of various men and women, all celebrated figures between the sixteenth and the early twentieth centuries, who lacked the usual complement of appendages—arms or legs or digits—and compensated in inspiring ways. He dotes especially on Matthew Buchinger, "The Wonderful Little Man of Nuremberg," who was born in 1674, died around 1740, and, in between, married four times, sired fourteen children, and "played more than a half dozen musical instruments, some of his own invention, and danced the hornpipe . . . amazed audiences with his skills at conjuring . . . was a marksman with the pistol and demonstrated trick shots at nine pins . . . was a fine penman; he drew portraits, landscapes, and coats of arms, and displayed remarkable calligraphic skills." Buchinger managed these transactions without the benefit of feet or thighs, and instead of arms he had "two fin-like excrescences growing from his shoulder blades." He stood, so to speak, only twenty-nine inches high. The Christie's auction enabled Jay to add significantly to his trove of Buchingeriana—playbills, engravings by and of the Wonderful Little Man, self-portraits, specimens of his calligraphy, and accounts of his performances as a conjurer.



Segueing from a passage about Carl Herman Unthan, who was armless, played the violin with his feet, toured in vaudeville as "Unthan, the Pedal Paganini," and "fired the rifle . . . with enough skill and accuracy to be compared with the great trick shot artists Ira Paine and Doc Carver," Jay writes, "Writers, scientists, and medical men have explored the psychologies and physiologies of these prodigies; they and the public alike are intrigued by the relationship between the horrific and miraculous."

This last phrase concisely expresses Jay's central preoccupation as a scholar and a performer. "Learned Pigs" contains only passing references to Houdini, whose tirelessness as a self-promoter was concomitant with his gifts as an illusionist. Jay has attempted to rescue from the margins of history performers who in their day were no less determined than Houdini to please their audiences. Here is an echt-Jay paragraph:

> As the novelty of fire-eating and -handling wore off, those performers not versatile enough to combine their talents into more diversified shows took to the streets. In 1861 Henry Mayhew, in Volume 3 of "London Labour and the London Poor," described one such salamander. After a fascinating and detailed account of a fire king learning his trade and preparing his demonstrations, we find the poor fellow has been reduced to catching rats with his teeth to earn enough money to survive.

The rest of the fire-handlers, geeks, acid-drinkers, bayonet-swallowers, mentalists, contortionists, illiterate savants, faith-healing charlatans, porcine-faced ladies, and noose-wearing high-divers who populate "Learned Pigs" routinely sacrifice their dignity, but they never lose their humanity. "I don't want to be seen as somebody who just writes about freaks," Jay says. "A lot of the people I write about were very famous in their day, and they were a great source of entertainment. Today, audiences are just as curious, just as willing to be amazed. But look at everything we're barraged with—it just doesn't lodge in the imagination the same way." His mission, in sum, is to reignite our collective sense of wonder.

Jay's fruitful combination of autodidacticism and free-lance scholarship is itself a wonderful phenomenon. Review-ing "Learned Pigs" in the *Times*, John Gross wrote, "One effect of Mr. Jay's scholarship is to make it clear that even among freaks and prodigies there is very little new under the sun. Show him a stone-eater or a human volcano or an enterologist and he will show you the same thing being done before, often hundreds of years earlier." In the Philadelphia *Inquirer* Carlin Romano wrote, " 'Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women' is a book so magnificently entertaining that if a promoter booked it into theatres and simply distributed a copy to each patron to read, he'd have the hit of the season." A blurb on the jacket from Penn and Teller says, "It's the coolest book . . . and probably the most brilliantly weird book ever." Jay wrote much of "Learned Pigs" while occupying a carrel in the rare-book stacks of the Clark Library, at U.C.L.A. At one point, Thomas Wright, a librarian at the Clark and a former professor of English literature, tried to persuade him to apply for a postdoctoral research fellowship. When Jay explained that he didn't have a doctorate, Wright said, "Maybe a master's degree would be sufficient."

"Thomas, I don't even have a B.A."

Wright replied, "Well, you know, Ricky, a Ph.D. is just a sign of docility."

"Oh, Lord! Now we're getting résumés along with the Chinese menus."

• •

As Jay was completing the writing of "Learned Pigs," he received an offer, unexpected and irresistible, to become the curator of the Mulholland Library of Conjuring and the Allied Arts. John Mulholland, who died in 1970, was a distinguished magician, historian, and writer. He was also a close friend of Houdini, whom he befriended in his capacity as editor of *The Sphinx*, the leading magic journal of its time. Above all, he was an obsessively thorough collector of printed materials and artifacts relating to magic and other unusual performing arts. In other words, if Jay and Mulholland had got to know each other they would have become soul mates. Mulholland's collection comprised some ten thousand volumes, in twenty languages. In 1966, he moved it to The Players Club, on Gramercy Park, and until his death he remained its curator. In 1984, the club put it up for sale. The auction gallery that was handling the sale enlisted Jay to help catalogue the collection and advise on its dispersal. Jay feared that it would be broken up or sold overseas, and either outcome seemed perilously likely. At a late hour, however, a young Los Angeles attorney, businessman, and novice magician named Carl Rheuban—someone Jay had never heard of—turned up and bought the library intact, for five hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars.

Like a lot of promoters who floated extravagant fantasies during the profligate eighties, Rheuban knew friendly and indulgent bankers. As it happened, the friendliest of these bankers was Rheuban himself. In 1983, he founded the First Network Savings Bank, leased office space in Century City, offered high interest rates to attract deposits from all over the country, and started investing the funds in complex and wishful real-estate ventures. By the spring of 1985, Jay had an office on the bank premises, where the collection was housed. Soon, he also had a steady salary, a staff of three assistants, a healthy acquisitions allowance, friendlier-than-ever relationships with dealers all over the world, and control of a superb research library. Plans were drafted for what Jay anticipated would be "a dream come true": the collection would be moved to a building in downtown Los Angeles, which would also accommodate a museum and a small theatre where he would regularly perform, as would other artists who appealed to his sensibilities. Edwin Dawes, a British historian of magic and a professor of biochemistry, who visited the library and regularly corresponded with Jay, has said, "It just seemed as if Ricky's fairy godmother had appeared to provide the environment in which to work and all the facilities to do the job." Even from the perspective of Jay, the inveterate skeptic, it was a nearly ideal situation. And, clearly, Rheuban, who was occupied with diverse enterprises, regarded him as the ideal overseer.

In April of 1990, however, First Network was abruptly closed by California banking regulators, and the Resolution Trust Corporation (R.T.C.), the federal agency created to cope with the nationwide savings-and-loan crisis, moved in to liquidate its assets. Rheuban soon filed for personal bankruptcy, and was reported to be the subject of a criminal-fraud investigation. With no forewarning, Jay discovered that he could not even gain access to his own office without first receiving permission from self-important bureaucrats who didn't know Malini from minestrone. The irony of this was unbearable. Had Ricky Jay, of all people, been victimized by a high-stakes con game?

If Rheuban did commit crimes, the government has yet to persuade a grand jury that they were transgressions worthy of an indictment. Nor does Jay at this point have a desire to know how, precisely, First Network came undone. Regardless of what was going on inside the bank, Jay had felt that his working arrangement with Rheuban was basically satisfactory. Though they have not spoken in almost two years, he expresses no bitterness toward his former employer and benefactor. For the functionaries of the R.T.C., however, he harbors deep contempt. Because Rheuban's personal insolvency was enmeshed with the bank's insolvency, the fate of the Mulholland Library was for many months suspended in legal limbo. Brian Walton, an attorney and friend of Jay's, who advised him during the fiasco, has said, "When you look at the question of the ownership of the library, the moral ownership was clearly in Ricky's hands. The financial ownership was obviously elsewhere. But, of course, artists will often become divorced from what they create. Every day, there would be one yahoo or another messing with what were, in a moral sense, Ricky's treasures. One day, Ricky came by the library and there were some government people videotaping the collection for inventory purposes. And they'd just placed their equipment wherever they felt like it. Ricky looked at one guy and said, 'Get your stuff off those posters.' And the guy said, 'I'm So-and-So, from the F.B.I.' And Ricky said, 'I don't care who the fuck you are. Get your crap off those posters.' "

The outlandishness of the situation was compounded by the fact that the Mulholland Library proved to be a splendid investment—the only asset in the First Network bankruptcy which had appreciated significantly. After a year and a half of what Jay regarded as neglect and mismanagement, the R.T.C. finally put it up for sale at auction. The day before the auction, which was to be presided over by a bankruptcy judge in a downtown courtroom, Jay gave me my first and last glimpse of the collection, which was still in Century City. In the building lobby, on our way to what had been First Network's offices, on the fifth floor, Jay pointed out that the bank's small retail operation was now occupied by a custom tailor shop. Upstairs, we walked through an empty anteroom that had once been lined with vitrines, then headed down a long beige-carpeted corridor. James Rust, a young R.T.C. employee, emerged from a corner office—formerly Rheuban's—and greeted us.

Our first stop was a large storage room filled with material from the collection of a German physician named Peter Hackhofer. "I bought different parts of this collection from Hackhofer in several crazy transactions," Jay said. "He used to lead me on incredible goose chases all over Germany. We'd end up doing business at three in the morning on the Autobahn, halfway between Cologne and Frankfurt. We'd be pulled over to the side of the road with theatrical posters spread out on the roof of his car. Once, I went all the way to Germany to buy a collection that Hackhofer was going to broker, only to find out that the owner refused to sell. Months later, in New York, I met Hackhofer at a hotel. He'd brought with him a hundred posters, which, because his room was so small, he spread out in the hallway. He had to restrain me from attacking a bellboy who rolled over some of them with a luggage cart." The storage room contained hundreds of books, in German and French, as well as a silk pistol, a billiard-ball stand, a vanishing and appearing alarm clock, a cube-shaped metal carrying case for a spirit bell, and a paper box with a ribbon on it, which was about the size of a lady's handbag, and which Jay said was "a Victorian production reticule." I knew that I could have happily occupied myself there for several hours, but he seemed eager to move on. We walked down another long corridor, past the erstwhile loan-servicing and accounting departments, and came to a locked door. As Rust unlocked it, Jay looked at me with a wry, I-will-now-have-my-liver-eaten-by-vultures sort of smile.

We stepped into a square room, perhaps thirty by thirty. Bookshelves and glass-enclosed cabinets lined the walls, and tables and flat files filled the interior. Separated from this room by a glass partition was a ten-by-twelve cubicle that had been Jay's office. It contained a desk, a wall of bookshelves, and a side table. Two automatons stood on the table. One, called "The Singing Lesson," was the creation of Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin, the nineteenth-century watchmaker-turned-conjurer, who is considered the father of modern magic. The other was a Chinese cups-and-balls conjurer built by Robert-Houdin's father-in-law, Jacques Houdin. A large, framed color poster of Malini, advertising his "Round the World Tour," hung on the wall to the left of Jay's desk.

"I heard that that poster holds some sort of special significance for you, Ricky," James Rust said.

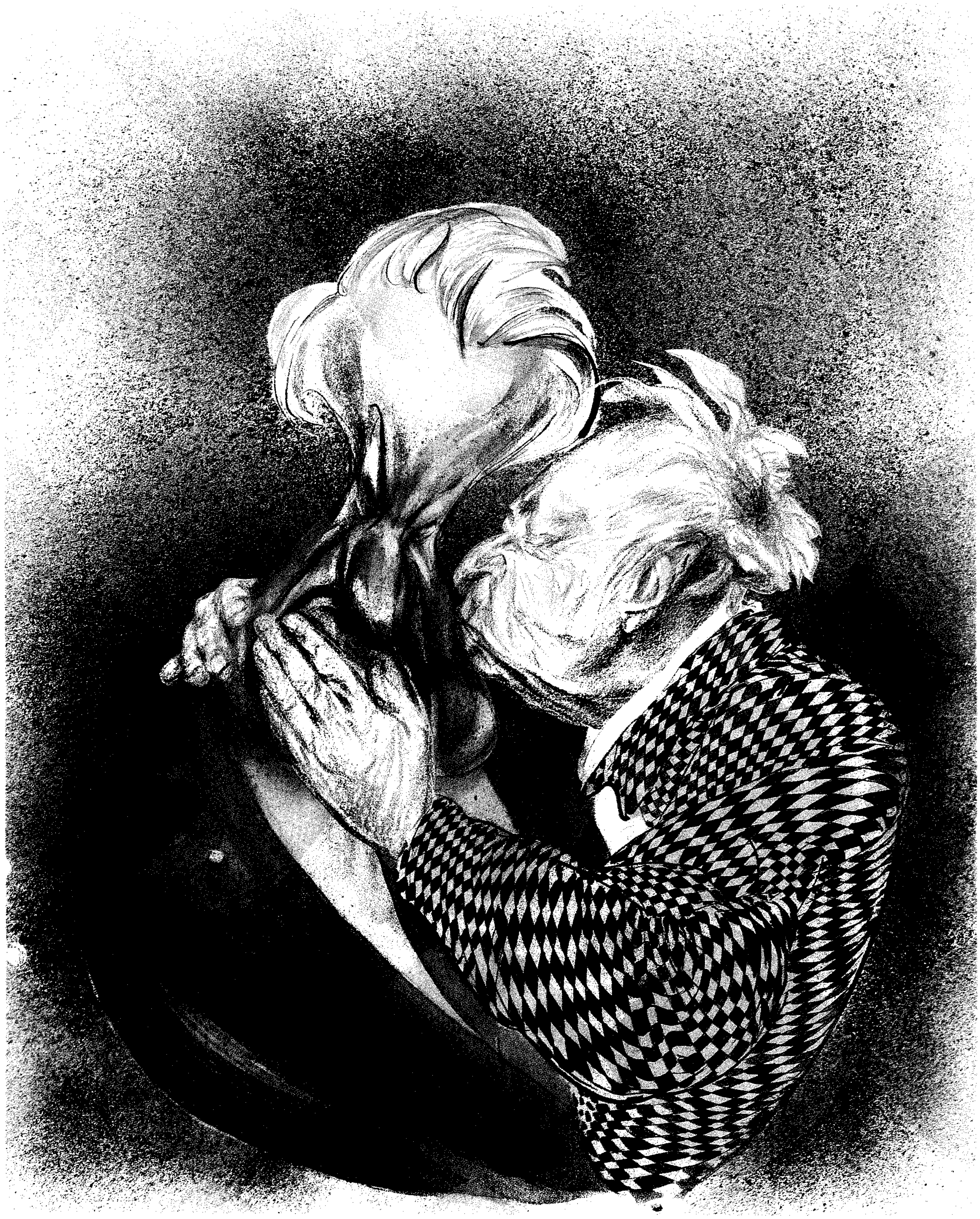
Jay responded with an opaque, querulous stare that said, in effect, "Hey, pal, everything in this place holds special significance for me."

Along the back wall of the main room were shelved bound volumes of *The Sphinx*, *The Wizard*, *The Conjurer's Monthly*, *The Linking Ring*, *The Magic Circular*, *Das Programm*, *La Prestidigitation*, *Ghost*, *The Magic Wand*, *The Gen*, *Mahatma*, and other periodicals. I spent an hour and a half in the main room, exploring the contents of the file drawers, staring into the glass display cases, pulling books from shelves, admiring framed lithographs, and listening to Jay. Ultimately, the experience was disquieting. Connected to virtually every item was a piquant vignette—a comic oddity, a compilation of historical or biographical arcana—but each digression inevitably led to a plaintive anticlimax, because the tangible artifacts had now passed from Jay's care. I paged through the scrapbook

ARTIST'S SKETCHBOOK BY STEVE BRODNER

YELTSIN SAVED

HIRSCHFELD PUNTS POST, BUYS RUSSIA



of Edward Maro, “a Chautauqua-circuit magician who played the mandolin and did hand shadows.” A Barnum & Bailey poster trumpeting automotive daredevils—“L’Auto Bolide Thrilling Dip of Death”—had been used by Jay when he was “writing a piece about crazy car acts for an automotive magazine.” There was a lithograph of Emil Naucke, a corpulent charmer in a flesh-colored tutu, of whom Jay said, “He was a German wrestler in drag, he was a famous strongman, he had a theatre of varieties, and as part of his act he danced with a midget.” A lithograph of Martini-Szeny depicted “a Hungarian Houdini imitator who wore chaps and a Mexican hat and used to have himself strapped to a cactus,” Jay said. “I was going to write a book on Houdini imitators that I would call ‘Houdini: Howdini, Oudini, Martini-Szeny, and Zucchini, Pretenders to the Throne.’ And with these reference books over here I could look up and see exactly where Martini-Szeny performed in, say, February of 1918. I bought this entire collection from an old circus artist in Atlanta who did a barrel act.”

We wandered back into Jay’s former office at one point. To his obvious annoyance, Rust wound up the “Singing Lesson” automaton. While it was playing, Jay turned his attention to a book that had been sitting on his desk, a seventeenth-century copy of the first book on magic to be printed in Dutch. The front cover had become separated from the binding.

“That’s nice,” he said with sarcasm. “This was not detached.”

Rust nodded in acknowledgment.

“That’s creepy,” Jay continued. “This was a really solid vellum binding. That’s why I don’t want people in here who don’t know how to handle books.”

“Do you know how many hands have been here, Ricky?”

“Yes, and it’s really creepy.”

When Rust left the room, Jay said to me, “You know, I never had any agreement with Carl. At the outset, he asked me, ‘What do you want?’ And I said, ‘I want access to this collection for the rest of my life.’ And he said, ‘Fine.’ After we moved in here, I unpacked every single book. We catalogued what we could, but, as with any active collection, you can never really catch up. In the five years I was here, I almost doubled the size of the collection. This was the only thing I ever did that I spoke of myself as doing into the indefinite future.”

THE PARROT HOUSE ON BRUTON STREET, 1830

(Edward Lear)

This very young man, face all flesh and bone—
Eyeglasses, gold and owlish, perch between
Parrots he peers at and his jungle brain. Those eyes,
So myopic they must blink to capture,

Accurately, screaming parrots, one by one.
In a keeper’s grip, wing tip to wing tip,
They measure such and such; he is making moues,
Surely he mimes the volumes of their horn-black beaks.

Then, while a thieving pencil sweeps up the crests
And down his own bent backbone strokes the plumage,
Turquoise, into place, people tiptoe in, to watch
Our artist copy the parrot he all but becomes.

Odder far, he thinks, these wicker bonnets,
Eyeballs which are beads, gnawed snickering lips
Than they have deemed his amiable psittacids;
And look, now he delineates the people’s noses—

Upon my word, how sniffily those humbugs behold
Not a “dirty artist” or “Wog’s Robin” now
But being tweaked, nothing to snicker at,
The organs of their own inquisitivities.

—Christopher Middleton

Shortly after eight o’clock the next morning, I picked Jay up in front of his apartment building, and we drove downtown to the courthouse, where the auction would take place. A couple of days earlier, he had said to me, “I’ve talked to a lot of people who say they might be bidding, and I can tell you that, without a single exception, they’re utterly soulless. No one gets it, no one has a clue to what the collection is really about. There actually are people who are knowledgeable about this, but they’re not the ones who are able to buy it.” As it was, the disposition of the Mulholland Library now seemed a foregone conclusion. David Copperfield, a workaholic stage illusionist who spends several weeks each year performing in Las Vegas and the other weeks touring the world, had agreed to pay two million two hundred thousand dollars for it. The only thing that could alter this outcome would be a competing bidder—bids would be allowed in minimum increments of fifty thousand dollars—and none had materialized.

At the courthouse, we discovered that the bankruptcy-court clerk had altered the docket and we were more than an hour early. Jay and I retreated to a cafeteria, where we were soon joined by William Dailey, the bookdealer, and by Steve Freeman, Michael Weber, and Brian Walton. When we finally entered the courtroom, Copperfield was already seated in the front row of the spectator gallery, along with two attorneys, a personal assistant, and a couple of advisers, who were also acquaintances of Jay’s. Twenty or so other people, among them several lawyers representing creditors in the Rheuban bankruptcy, were also present. Copperfield is a slender, almost gaunt man in his mid-thirties with thick black eyebrows, brown eyes, aquiline features, and leonine dark hair. He was dressed all in black: double-breasted suit, Comme des Garçons T-shirt, suède cowboy boots.

John Gaughan, a designer of stage illusions, who was seated with Copperfield, said to Jay, "Did you bring some cards?"

"Oh, yes," Jay replied. "When you feel your life threatened, you're always prepared." Then he asked Copperfield, "Where have you come from?"

"Atlantic City."

"Ah—from one gambling arena to another."

The judge, the Honorable Vincent P. Zurzolo, appeared briefly, only to learn that Katherine Warwick, the main lawyer for the R.T.C., had not yet arrived. Ten minutes later, she breezed in and, in a friendly, casual manner, distributed to the other lawyers present her reply to a motion objecting to the allocation of the proceeds. About half an hour of legalistic colloquy ensued—a debate over whether the auction could even take place and, if so, when. At last, the Judge asked a fifty-thousand-dollar question: "Is there anyone who is here to overbid the bidder who has made the initial offer?"

There was a minute of silence, broken in my corner of the spectator section by Jay muttering, "Unbelievable. Unbelievable."

And, with that, David Copperfield—a man who owned neither a home nor an automobile but was reported to be looking for a warehouse; a man whose stage presentations were once described to me as "resembling entertainment the way Velveeta resembles cheese"—had bought the Mulholland Library for two million two hundred thousand dollars. Katherine Warwick reminded Copperfield's attorneys that he had fifteen days—until the end of the month—to remove the collection from Century City, because the R.T.C. was shutting down its operation there. There were handshakes among the Copperfield entourage, and then Copperfield approached Jay.

"Thank you for everything," he said, extending his hand.

"You'll enjoy it," Jay said. "I did."

"You know you'll be welcome any time."

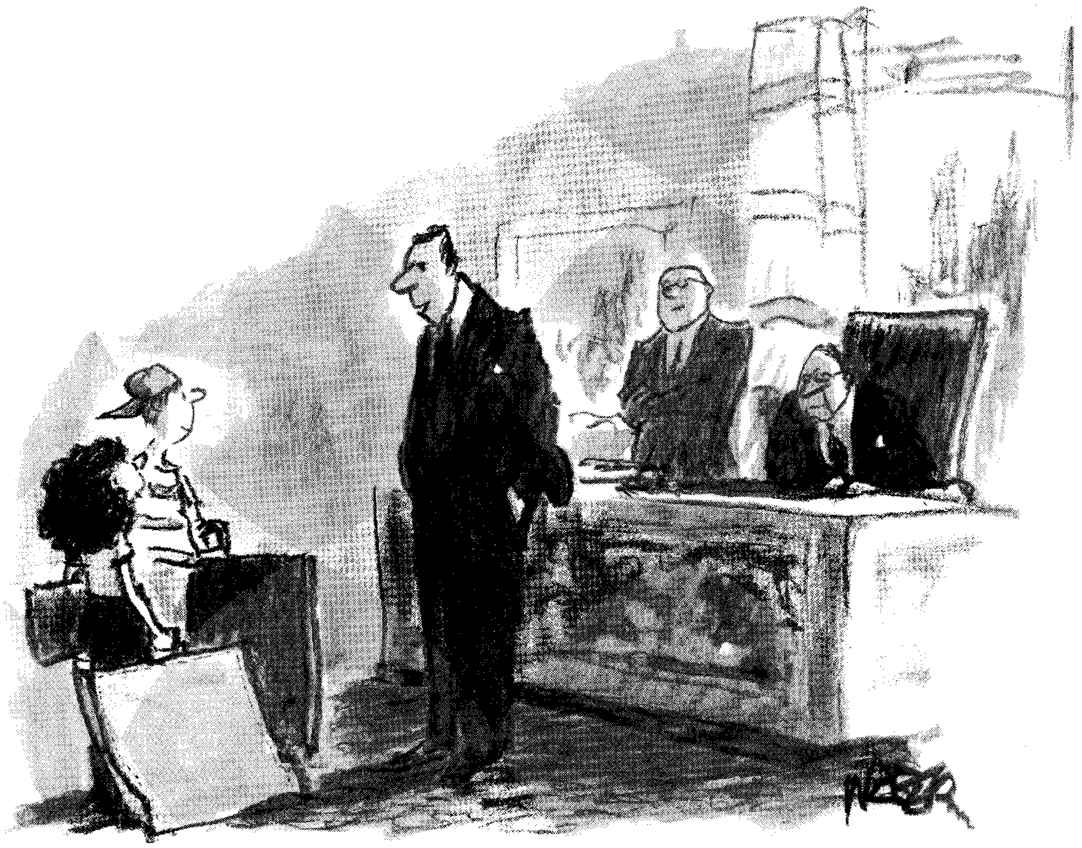
"We'll speak again in the future, I'm sure," Jay said.

A friend of Jay's who also knew Copperfield said to me later, "David Copperfield buying the Mulholland Library is like an Elvis impersonator winding up with Graceland."

A few weeks ago, Copperfield arranged for Jay to be flown to Las Vegas to discuss the collection. A driver met Jay at the airport and delivered him to a warehouse. In front was an enormous neon sign advertising bras and girdles. It was Copperfield's conceit that the ideal way for a visitor to view the Mulholland Library would be to pass first through a storefront filled with lingerie-clad mannequins and display cases of intimate feminine apparel. With enthusiasm, Copperfield escorted Jay around the premises, insisting that he read each of the single-entendre slogans posted on the walls—"We Support Our Customers" and "Our Bras Will Never Let You Down"—and also the punning tributes inscribed on celebrity photographs from the likes of Debbie Reynolds, Jerry Lewis, and Buddy Hackett. When Copperfield pressed one of the red-nippled breasts of a nude mannequin, the electronic lock on a mirrored door deactivated, and he and Jay stepped into the main warehouse space. Construction work had recently been completed on an upper level. Jay followed Copperfield up a stairway and into a suite of rooms that included several offices, a bedroom, and a marble-tiled bathroom. The bathroom had two doors, one of which led to an unpartitioned expanse where the contents of the Mulholland Library—much of it shelved exactly as it had been in Century City, some of it on tables, some of it not yet unpacked—had been deposited.

Jay stayed an hour—long enough to register pleasure at seeing the collection once again and dismay at the context in which he was seeing it. When Copperfield asked whether he would be willing to work as a consultant on an occasional basis—"Basically, he wanted to know whether, whenever he needs me, I would drop whatever I'm doing and tell him what he'd bought"—Jay recognized an offer that he could easily resist.

After Jay returned to Los Angeles, he said, "As much as I love this collection, I didn't think I could handle going



"We're shopping around for a new agency, and we thought you people might be interested in making a pitch."

through Copperfield's bra-and-girdle emporium every time I went to see it."

CLEARLY, Jay has been more interested in the craft of magic than in the practical exigencies of promoting himself as a performer. His friend T. A. Waters has said, "Ricky has turned down far more work than most magicians get in a lifetime." Though he earns high fees whenever he does work, a devotion to art rather than a devotion to popular success places him from time to time in tenuous circumstances. At the moment, he is mobilizing a project that should reward him both artistically and financially. What he has in mind is a one-man show, on a stage somewhere in New York, to be billed as "Ricky Jay and His 52 Assistants"—an evening's entertainment with a deck of cards. He envisions an intimate setting.

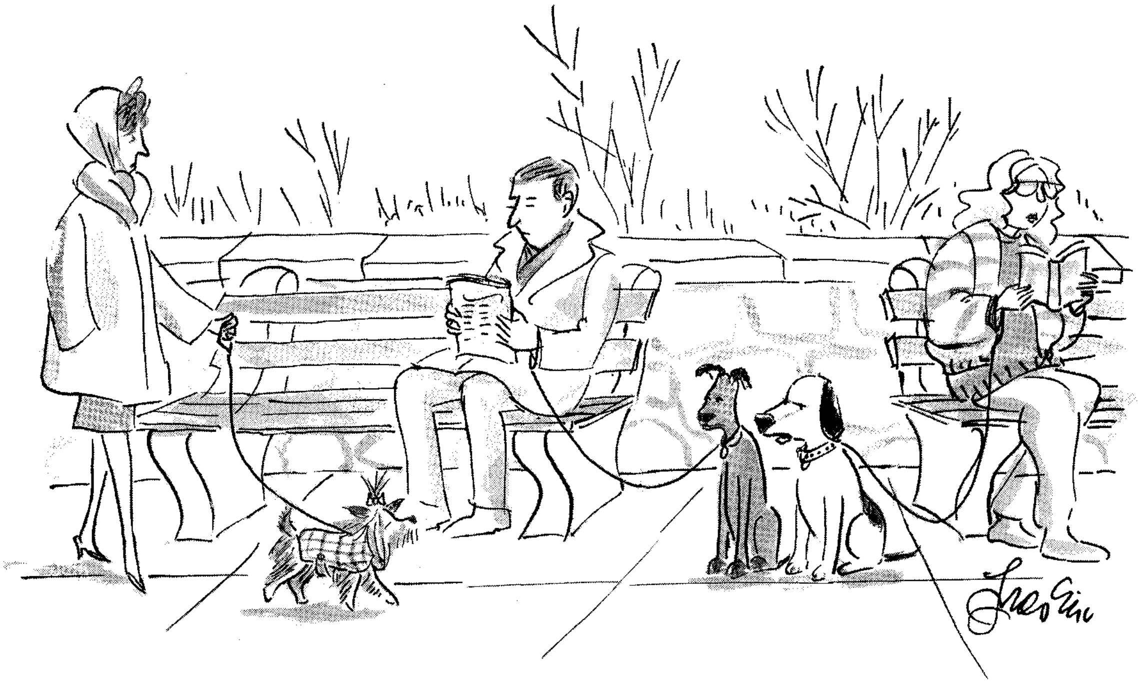
"All I value as a performer is for people to want to see me," Jay says. "I mean people who have come just to see me—they're not going out to hear music, they're not out to get drunk or to pick up women. I'd much rather perform in a small theatre in front of a few people than in an enormous Las Vegas night club."

Provided that the right theatre and the right situation materialize, David Mamet has agreed to direct such a production. "I'm very honored to be asked," Mamet told me. "I regard Ricky as an example of the 'superior man,' according to the I Ching definition. He's the paradigm of what a philosopher should be: someone who's devoted his life to both the study and the practice of his chosen field."

Having directed Jay now in three films—and they are collaborating on the screenplay of another—Mamet holds him in high esteem as an actor. "Ricky's terrific," Mamet said. "He doesn't make anything up. He knows the difference between doing things and not doing things. The magician performs a task and the illusion is created in the mind of the audience. And that's what acting is about."

Jay now spends the greater part of his typical workdays alone in his Old Spanish-style Hollywood apartment. It is the repository of his collection, the research facility for his scholarly pursuits. Overloaded bookshelves line the living-room and bedroom walls, and stacks of books on the floors make navigation a challenge. Posters, playbills, and engravings decorate any available wall space—several Buchingers, Toby the Learned Pig (the most gifted of the sapient swine), Madame Girardelli (the fireproof woman), Houdini suspended upside down in a water-torture cell, Erno Acosta balancing a piano on his head, a three-sheet poster of Cinquevalli (the most famous juggler at the turn of the century). Jay sleeps beneath a huge color lithograph of an Asian-looking man billed as Okito, whom he described to me as "the fifth of six generations or the fourth of five generations—depending on whose story you want to believe—of a family of Dutch Jewish magicians, a twentieth-century performer whose real name was Theodore Bamberg." Between two books on a shelf in the corner of his kitchen is a photograph of Steve Martin, inscribed "To Ricky, Without you there would be no Flydini. Think about it. Steve." This refers to a comedy-magic routine that Jay helped Martin develop a few years ago, a dumb-show piece that he has performed at charity events and on television. As the Great Flydini, Martin appears onstage dressed in tails, unzips his trousers, and smiles uncomfortably as an egg emerges from his fly, followed by another egg, a third egg, a lit cigarette, a puff of smoke, two more eggs, a ringing telephone, a bouquet of flowers, a glass of wine, a silk handkerchief that a pretty girl walks off with and drops, whereupon it flies back inside his trousers, a Pavarotti hand puppet, and soap bubbles.

The last time I visited Jay in his apartment, he was working simultaneously on more than half a dozen projects. Within the past year, he has begun to do his writing on a computer, rather than in longhand on a legal pad with a calligraphic pen. This has evidently not made the process any less daunting. "Writing is the only thing in my life that hasn't got easier," he said. "I can say that categorically. Right now, I'm finishing a magazine article that was supposed to be about human ingenuity, but somehow I've ended up writing about child prodigies. Here's my lead sentence: 'Solomon Stone, the midget lightning calculator, was an overachiever.' I go from Solomon Stone to the Infant Salambo. This was a child who was from a turn-of-the-century show-biz family. She was abandoned by them for several years, and when they turned up again they realized she had been neglected, had had absolutely no education. But within a year she



"Here comes God's gift to Central Park West."

was appearing onstage, having been reinvented as Salambo, the Infant Historian—get this—‘absolutely the most clever and best-informed child the world has ever seen.’ ”

He showed me a prospectus for *Jay’s Journal of Anomalies*, a letterpress-printed broadside for “a periodical devoted to the investigation of conjurers, cheats, hustlers, hoaxers, pranksters . . . arcana, esoterica, curiosa, varia . . . scholarly and entertaining . . . amusing and elucidating . . . iconographically stimulating . . . ”

“I just finished a piece for *Jay’s Journal* on performing dogs who stole the acts of other dogs,” he said. “Next, I want to do a piece about crucifixion acts—you know, real crucifixions that were done as entertainment. The idea for this came to me one Easter Sunday. Bob Lund, from the American Museum of Magic, has just sent me a little book on Billy Rose’s Theatre that contained one sentence he knew would interest me—about a woman who swung nude from a cross to the strains of Ravel’s ‘Boléro.’ Her name was Faith Bacon. This was in the thirties. Unlike some of the other performers I’ve turned up, in her act she only simulated crucifixion. Anyway, I’m playing around with that.”

Over the past few years, Jay has given a number of lectures on the origins of the confidence game, which he hopes to expand into a book-length history of cheating and deception. For the Whitney Museum’s Artists and Writers series, he is writing a book to be illustrated by William Wegman and others. It is a history of trick magic books, which were first produced in the sixteenth century. “I’m really intrigued with the concept of the book as both a subject and an object of mystery,” he said.

Most afternoons, Jay spends a couple of hours in his office, on Sunset Boulevard, in a building owned by Andrew Solt, a television producer who three years ago collaborated with him on an hour-long CBS special entitled “Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women,” which is the only prime-time network special ever hosted by a sleight-of-hand artist. He decided now to drop by the office, where he had to attend to some business involving a new venture that he has begun with Michael Weber—a consulting company called Deceptive Practices, Ltd., and offering “Arcane Knowledge on a Need to Know Basis.” They are currently working on the new Mike Nichols film, “Wolf,” starring Jack Nicholson. When Jay arrived at his office, he discovered that a parcel from a British dealer had been delivered in that day’s mail.

“Oh my. Oh my. This is wonderful,” he said as he examined an early-nineteenth-century chapbook that included a hand-colored engraving of its subject—Claude Seurat, the Living Skeleton. “Look,” he said, pointing to some scratched numerals on the verso of the title page. “This shelf mark means this was in the library of Thomas Phillips, the most obsessive book-and-manuscript collector of the nineteenth century.”

The mail had also brought a catalogue from another British dealer, who was offering, for a hundred and fifty pounds, an engraving and broadside of Ann Moore, the Fasting Woman of Tutbury. By the time we left the office, an idea for an issue of *Jay’s Journal* had begun to percolate.

“I could do fasting impostors and living skeletons,” Jay said. “Or what might really be interesting would be to do living skeletons and fat men. For instance, I could write about Seurat and Edward Bright, the Fat Man. Except I might prefer a contemporary of Seurat’s, Daniel Lambert. He was even fatter than Bright, but he’s been written about more. With Bright, the pleasure would be writing about the wager involving his waistcoat. When he died, the wager was that five men twenty-one years of age could fit into his waistcoat. As it happened, seven grown men could fit inside. I have an exquisite black-and-white engraving of Bright, from 1751. And I have a great hand-colored engraving of Bright and Lambert, from 1815, which has an inset of the seven men in the waistcoat.”

Back at the apartment, Jay examined the Seurat book and brought out for comparison an 1827 eight-page French pamphlet on Seurat. I asked what other Seurat material he had, and he removed his shoes, stood on the arm of a sofa, and brought down from a shelf one of four volumes of the 1835 edition of “Hone’s Every Day Book, and Table Book; or, Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements, Sports, Pastimes, Ceremonies, Manners, Customs, and Events, Incident to Each of the Three Hundred and Sixty-five Days, in Past and Present Times; forming a Complete History of the Year, Months, and Seasons, and a Perpetual Key to the Almanac.” In it he immediately found two engravings of Seurat, alongside one of which he had written in pencil a page reference to a competing living skeleton. “Oh, yes, I remember this,” he said. “I have stuff on other living skeletons, too. I’ve got to show you this George Anderson poster I bought at an auction in London in 1983.”

We moved into the dining room, where there was a flat-file cabinet. He opened the bottom drawer, which was filled to capacity with lithographs and engravings, each one a Ricky Jay divagation: “T. Nelson Downs, the King of Koins . . . Samri S. Baldwin, the White Mahatma . . . Holton the Cannonball Catcher. I have a lot of stuff on cannonball catchers. . . . The Freeze Brothers, blackfaced tambourine jugglers . . . Sylvester Schaffer, a great variety artist . . . Josefa and Rosa Blazek, the Bohemian violin-playing Siamese twins. And here are Daisy and Violet Hilton, the saxophone-playing Siamese twins from San Antonio. . . . And here’s Rastelli, perhaps the greatest juggler who ever lived. . . . What’s that? Oh, a poster for ‘House of Games.’ . . . I’m just trying to get to the George Anderson piece that’s sticking out at the end. . . . Oh, this is the Chevalier D’Eon, a male fencer in drag. He used to be the French Ambassador to the Court of St. James’s. It’s a great story but it takes too long.”

Jay had reached and placed on the dining-room table the George Anderson poster, a postbellum piece printed in New Hampshire using wooden type and a large woodblock image of Anderson, who had made an art and livelihood of attenuation. He appeared to be five and a half feet tall and to weigh about sixty-five pounds.

“I know some people find this strange and weird,” Jay said. “Actually, after this life I’ve lived, I have no idea what is strange and weird and what isn’t. I don’t know who else waxes poetic about the virtues of skeleton men, fasting impostors, and cannonball catchers. And, to be honest, I don’t really care. I just think they’re wonderful. I really do.” ◆

THE MILITARY LIFE

LIBERATING FORCES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD AVEDON

It was mainly one event, the Hollywood fund-raiser at which Bill Clinton spoke so feelingly to a gay and lesbian audience last May, that won him the heart of a homosexual community yearning for a champion. And there was a certain dream that its host, David Mixner, painted when he introduced his old friend Bill. It was of the moment when, with "all of us standing like this on the lawn of the White House next March," President Clinton would end, "with the stroke of a pen," the ban on gays in the military which had stood for roughly fifty years.

To homosexuals, the Pentagon ban represents the culture's refusal to accept them unless they deny who they are. All but two of the seven officers and enlisted men shown in the following photographs are in the process of being discharged from active or ready reserve duty, not for homosexual acts but for being homosexual. It is this policy that has kept countless men and women leading secret lives in uniform; and the gay community, which came of age as a voting bloc on November 3rd, saw it as a rule that could be changed by the person in charge. But dreams don't operate on deadline, and, as events since Inauguration Day have shown, there is a lot of history to get free of, and there is more than one person in charge.

This week, as a six-month period of study agreed to by the President continues to unfold, the first of a series of hearings on the issue will be held by the Senate Armed Services Committee, chaired by Senator Sam Nunn, of Georgia, a powerful opponent who has promised to be fair. They will begin with an examination of the history of the policy.

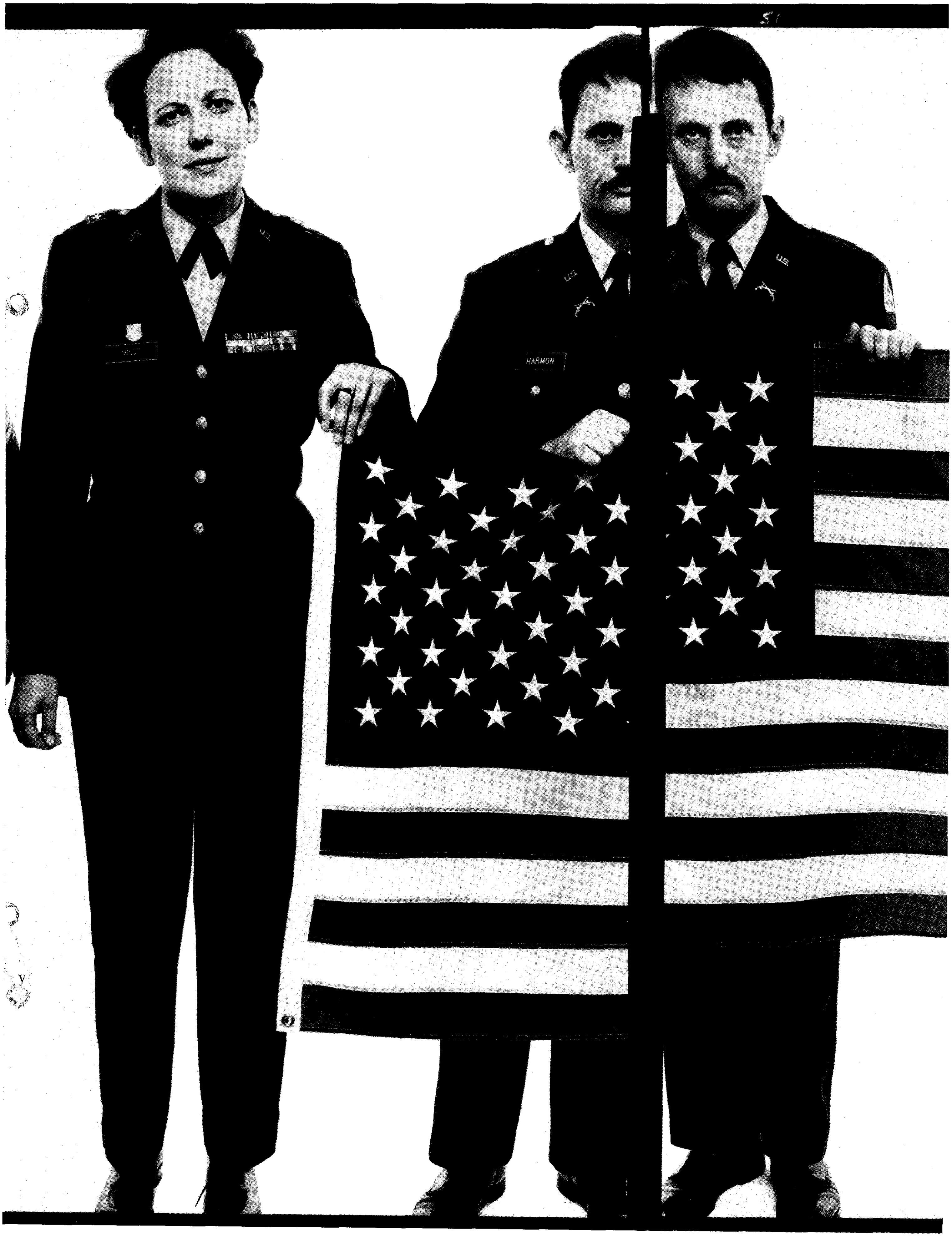
At Valley Forge and New Orleans, at Antietam and the Argonne, there was no policy concerning homosexuals. Though homosexual acts were considered sins by Christians and crimes by courts, it was not until the Second World War that the military, influenced by psychoanalytic theory, which considered homosexuality an illness, began asking recruits if they were homosexual. Of those who managed to enlist anyway, at least eighty thousand have been discharged, often dishonorably, since 1943, thirteen thousand of them during the nineteen-eighties alone. Many have gone quietly; but there have been brutal inquisitions aimed at finding gays and lesbians in the ranks. The American Psychiatric Association changed its mind twenty years ago. The general culture has grown more accepting. The Pentagon kept tightening down.

To many in the military and their supporters, who talk of group showers and lack of privacy, the question isn't status; it is sex. "When you declare your status," Senator Nunn said on "Meet the Press" the other Sunday, "you are describing your behavior." To others, both gay and straight, the question is one of civil rights, and of citizenship.

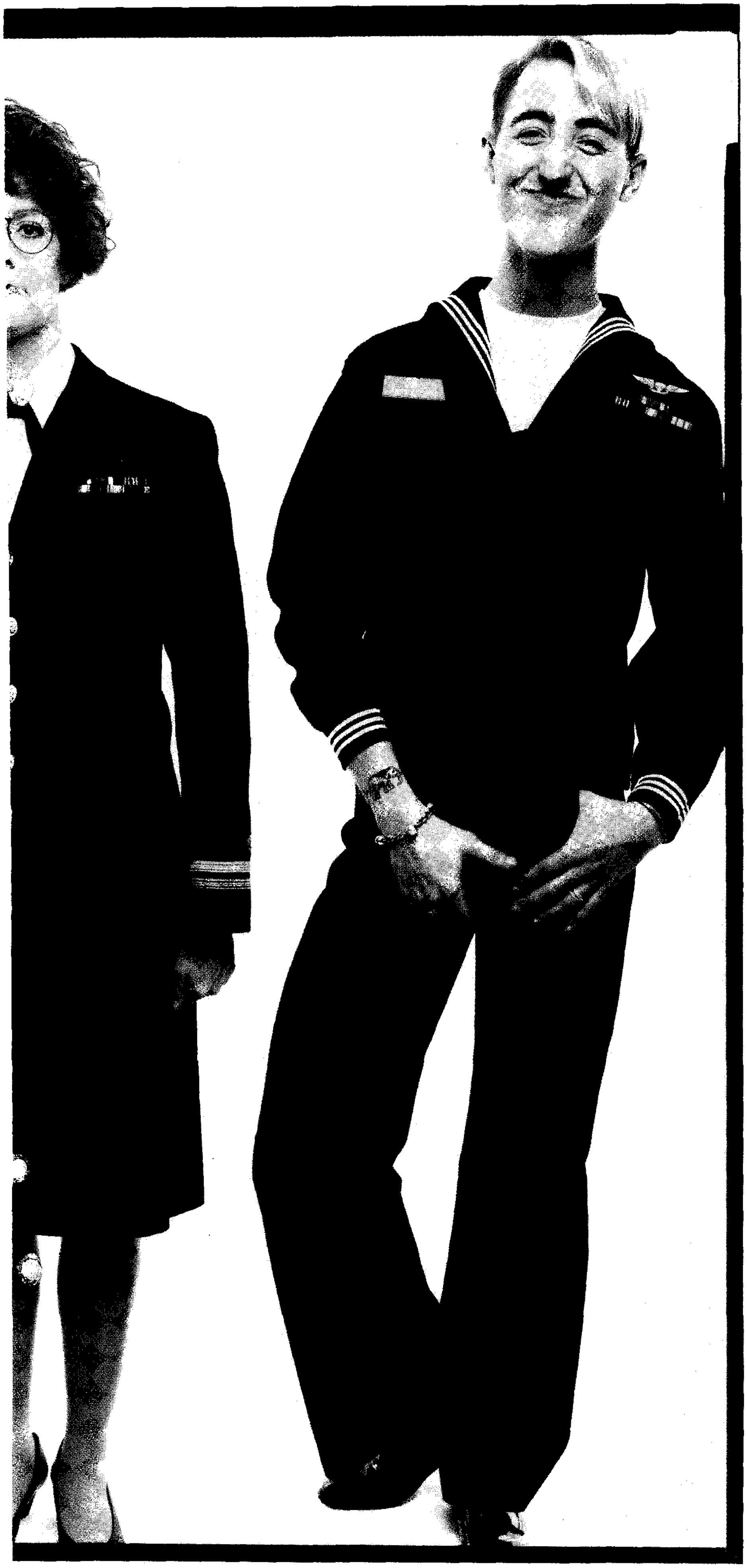
When Clinton said last Tuesday, at his first press conference, that he would consider removing the ban by allowing the military to segregate gays, the doubts that had been growing among homosexuals about their champion erupted. "We may have placed too much faith and trust in someone who doesn't share our own passion for our own freedom," Mixner said after the press conference. The next night, he went on "Nightline" to declare that segregating gays "is morally wrong, it is repugnant, it is something that we cannot accept."

Bill Clinton was a man at a crossroads. Mixner, his old friend, posed his dilemma for him in a sermon prepared for delivery on Saturday at the Metropolitan Community Church in Dallas. The President, Mixner said, as if addressing him directly, could stand with the great emancipator, Lincoln, as "a man who freed millions," or be remembered as one who, "for political expediency, negotiated our freedom away in the back rooms of Congress. It is your choice. We have made ours."

—Dudley Clendinen


HARMON

VALLEJO



From left to right,
beginning on page 74:

Sergeant Justin Elzie, thirty, Marine Corps. Stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Ten-year career. Awaiting administrative hearing.

Captain Pam Mindt, thirty-three, Army National Guard. Lives in Minneapolis. Sixteen-year career in the reserves. Awaiting administrative hearing.

Major Robert Harmon, forty, Army Individual Ready Reserve. Nineteen-year military career. Lives in Marin County, California. Awaiting action on security clearance; no other proceedings pending.

Navy Hospital Corpsman Third Class Michael Vallejo, twenty-four. Works at Branch Medical Clinic, Alameda Naval Air Station, California. Awaiting administrative hearing.

Lieutenant Commander A. Fran Watson, forty, Navy Individual Ready Reserve. Medical doctor. Lives in suburban Minneapolis. Underwent Board of Inquiry hearing on March 8th; recommended for honorable discharge.

Lieutenant Zoe Dunning, twenty-nine, Navy Selected Reserve. Annapolis graduate; six years active duty. Now an M.B.A. student at Stanford. Awaiting Board of Inquiry hearing.

Navy Yeoman Third Class B. Murphy Stovie, twenty-one. Stationed for two years in Keflavík, Iceland; now works in a Navy shipyard in Philadelphia. Said he was gay on induction paperwork. No proceedings pending.

FICTION

FULL MOON OVER MILAN

BY ANDREA LEE

IT began with rubber bands. The silly sentence bobs up in Merope's mind as she sits over a plate of stewed octopus that along with everyone else's dinner will be paid for by one of the rich men at the table. Rogue phrases have been invading her brain ever since she arrived in Milan and started living in another language: she'll be in a meeting with her boss and a client, chatting away in Italian about headlines and body copy for a Sicilian wine or the latest miracle panty liner, when a few words in English will flit across the periphery of her thoughts like a film subtitle gone wild.

Her friend Clay with typical extravagance says that the phrases are distress signals from the American in her who refuses to die, but Merope has never intended to stop being American. Her grandparents came from a British Caribbean island called Montserrat, and her earliest continuous memories are of her mother and father, both teachers, wearing themselves out in New Rochelle to bestow a seamless Yankee childhood on their two ungrateful daughters. Such immigrants' gifts always come with strings attached that appear after decades, that span continents and oceans: at twenty-eight Merope can no more permanently abandon America than she could turn away from the exasperating love engraved on her parents' faces. So she is writing copy in Italy on a sort of indefinite sabbatical, an extension of her role as family grasshopper, the daughter who at college dabbled in every arcane do-it-yourself feminist Third World folklorish arts-and-crafts kind of course as her sister Maia ploughed dutifully along toward Wharton; who no sooner graduated than went off to Manhattan to live for a mercifully brief spell with a crazed sculptor from whom she was lucky enough to catch nothing worse than nits.

With family and lovers Merope learned early to defend her own behavior by adopting the role of ironic spectator, an overperceptive little girl observing unsurprised the foibles of her elders. The role suits her: she is small with large unsettling eyes and nowadays a stylish little Eton crop of slicked-back straightened hair. Milan suits her, too: after two years she is still intrigued by its tenacious eighties-style vulgarity and by the immemorial Gothic sense of doom that lies like a medieval stone wall beneath the flimsy revelry of the fashion business. The sun and communal warmth of the Mezzogiorno have never attracted her as they do her English girlfriends; she likes the northern Italian fog—it feels like Europe. She respects as well the profound indifference of the city to its visitors from other countries. From the beginning she's been smart enough to understand that the more energetically one sets oneself to master all kinds of idiom in a foreign country, the sooner one uncovers the bare, incontrovertible fact that one is foreign. The linked words that appear and flit about her brain seemingly by sheerest accident, like bats in a summer cottage, seem to Merope to be a logical response to her life in a place where most really interesting things are hidden. The phrases are playful, but like other ephemera—dreams, advertisements, slips of the tongue—if you catch and examine them, they offer oblique comment on events at hand.

This dinner, for example—three Italian men and three foreign women gathered without affection but with a lot of noisy laughter on a May evening in the outdoor half of a restaurant in the Brera district. It did in a certain way come about through rubber bands—the oversized pink ones that provide fruitful resistance to the limbs of the women in the exercise class where Merope met Clay at noon. If Merope hadn't been dripping with sweat and demoralized by the pain she would have said no, as she has privately resolved to do whenever Clay gets that glint in her eye and starts talking about extremely interesting, extremely successful men.

The exercise class they attend is a notorious one in Milan: it is dedicated entirely to buttocks, and is even called simply "Buttocks"—"*Glutei.*" Rich Milanese housewives, foreign businesswomen, and models without any hips to speak of flock to the Conture Gym to be put through their paces by a Serbian ex-gymnast named Nadia, in an atmosphere of groaning and mass agony that suggests a labor ward in a charity clinic. Merope is annoyed at herself for being insecure enough to attend—her small, lofty Caribbean backside, after all, ranks on the list of charms she sometimes allows her boyfriends to enumerate. Yet, Tuesdays and Thursdays at midday, she finds herself there, resentfully squatted on a springy green mat. Sometimes, looking around her, she draws a professional bead on those quivering international ranks of fannies: she sees them in a freeze-frame, an ad for universal feminine folly.

Her friend Clay, on the other hand, adores ass class, or the Butt Club, as she alternately calls it. She says that she likes her perversions to work for her. Clay is the class star, the class clown. In a glistening white Avengers-style unitard, she hoists and gyrates her legs with gusto, lets out elemental whoops of pain, swaps wisecracks in Italian with Nadia, flops about exuberantly in her bonds, tossing her sweat-soaked red hair like a captive mermaid, occasionally sending a snapped rubber band zinging across the dance floor. Merope sometimes thinks that if Clay didn't exist it would be necessary to invent her—at least for her, Merope's, own survival on the frequent days when Milan appears through the mist as a dull provincial town.

A case in point: last Sunday, when Merope and Clay and a friend of Clay's, a Colorado blonde who works at Christie's, were taking the train over the Swiss border to Lugano to see the American Impressionist show at the Thyssen-Bornemisza, Clay got up to go to the toilet, found the toilet in their train compartment not up to her exacting standards, went down to the next car, and there suddenly found herself left behind in Italy as the train divided in two at the border. Merope and the other woman sat staring dumbly at Clay's beautiful ostrich-skin bag on the seat as their half of the train tootled merrily on into Switzerland.

However, after a few minutes, the train drew to a halt in a small suburban station not on the schedule of express stops, and as the few other people in the car began peering curiously out of the window, a clanking, clanging sound announced the arrival of another train behind them. Merope and the other girl jumped up, ran to the end platform of the car, and saw arriving a sort of yellow toy engine, the kind used for track repair, and inside, flanked by two Italian conductors wearing besotted grins, was Clay, red hair flying, waving like the Queen Mother.

Clay is busy these days ironing out the last wrinkles of a complicated divorce from a rich Milanese who manufactures something rarely thought of but essential, like tongue depressors. Then she is immediately getting married again, to a Texan, with dazzling blue eyes and a glibber tongue than an Irishman's, who won Clay by falling on his knees and proposing in front of an intensely interested crowd of well-dressed drinkers at Baretto, in Via Sant' Andrea. Maybe Texas will be big enough for her. Italy, thinks Merope, has always seemed a bit confining for her friend, like one of those tight couture jackets Clay puts on to go to the office, where for the past few years she has run a gift-buying service for Italian companies who want to shower Bulgari trinkets on crucial Japanese. Nowadays she's shutting down the business, talks about Texas real estate, about marketing Italian cellulite creams in America, about having babies.

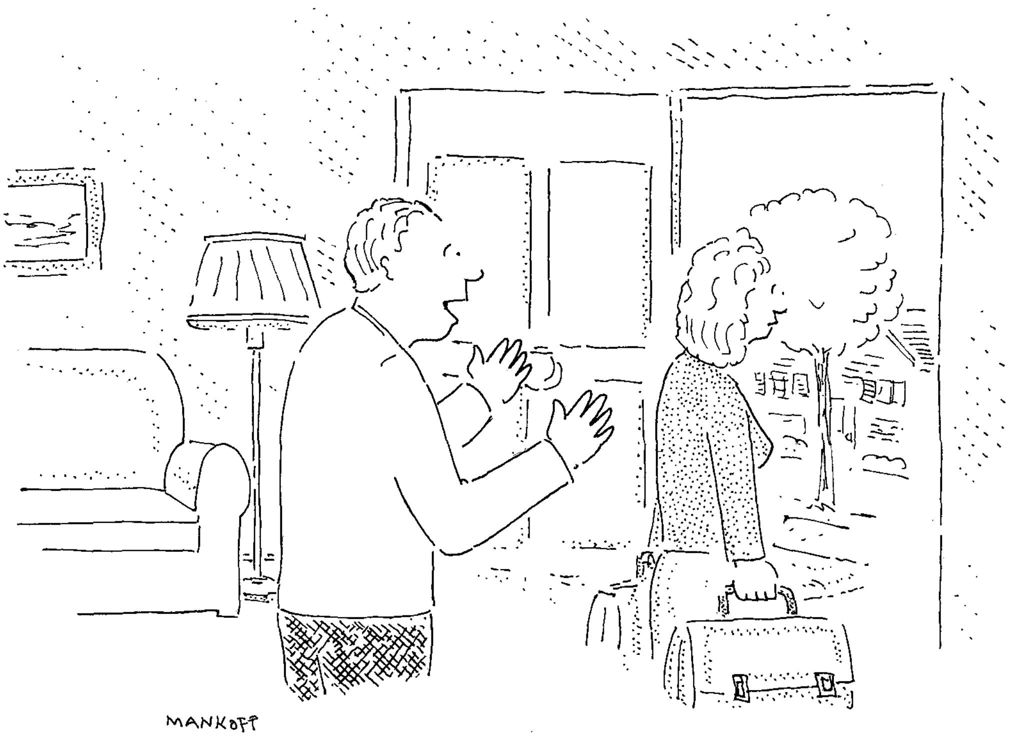
Merope feels a predictable resentment toward the Texas Lochinvar who rode out of the West and broke up the eleven months of high times she and Clay had been enjoying as bachelorettes in Milan. Now she would have to start a real life in Milan—unlikely, this—or return home. Her weather instincts tell her that her friend's engagement means that she herself will fall in love again soon: another partner will come along in a few beats to become essential as salt, to put her through changes, perhaps definitive ones. Clay says that what she wants most in the world to see before she leaves for Houston is Merope settled with a nice man; every time they go out together, she parades an international array of prospects, as if Merope were a particularly picky executive client.

Merope isn't in the mood yet to settle down with a nice man; in fact last October, when she met Clay, she had just made a nice man move out of the apartment they'd shared for a year and a half in the Navigli district. She'd explained this to Clay in the first five minutes they'd started talking, at a party in the so-called Chinese district, near Corso Bramante. "He was awfully dear. He was Dutch: sweet in the way those northern men can be sweet. Crazy about me the way a man from one of those colonizing countries can be about a brown-skinned woman. A photographer. Never fell in love with models, *and* he cooked fantastic Indonesian food. But he was making me wicked."

Clay, shoehorned into a Chanel suit of an otherworldly pink, stuck her chin into her empty wineglass and puffed out her cheeks. Across the room she'd looked like a schoolgirl, wandering through the crowd with downcast eyes, smiling at some naughty thought of her own; up close her beautiful face was a magnet for light, might have been Jewish or not, might have been thirtyish or not, might or might not have undergone a few surgical nips and tucks. Merope had at first glance classified her, erroneously, as "Fashion"—as belonging to the flamboyant tribe of ageless nomads who follow the collections between Europe and New York as migrant workers follow the harvests.

Clay, however, was beyond Fashion. "Because he was too good," she said in a thoughtful voice, of Merope's Dutch ex-boyfriend. Her accent in English, like her face, was hard to define: a few European aspirates that slid unexpectedly into an unabashed American flattening of vowels. "No respectable woman," she added, "should have to put up with *that*."

The party was given by a friend of Merope's—a model married to an Italian journalist, who occasionally got together with some of the other black American and Caribbean models to cook barbecue. The models got raunchy and loud on these occasions, and that night hung intertwined over the beer and ribs, hooting with laughter, forming a sort of gazebo of long, beautiful brown



"But what about all our refinancing plans?"

limbs, while a bit of Fashion and a few artistic Milanese buzzed around the edges. Merope had arrived with a painter who dressed only in red and kept goats in his city garden—the type of character who through some minor law of the universe inevitably appears in the social life of a young woman who has just broken off a stable relationship. When the painter left her side and went off to flirt vampirishly with everyone else in the room, Merope started talking with Clay and instantly realized, with the sense of pure recognition one has in falling in love, or in the much rarer and more subtle process of identifying a new friend, that this was the person she had been looking for to get in trouble with in Milan.

Clay's too hastily proffered description was of a family vaguely highborn, vaguely European, vaguely American (her passport, like her pithy syntax, demonstrated the latter) and of a childhood passed in a sort of whistle-stop tour of the oddest combination of places—Madrid; Bristol, England; Gainesville, Florida. By comparison, Merope's own family seemed as stable as Plymouth Rock. She was tickled: Clay gave her a school's-out feeling after her model friends, who, for all their wild looks and the noise they made, were really just sweet, hardworking, secretly studious girls.

Over that fall and winter she and Clay, without finding out much more about each other, spent a lot of time together, chivying a string of Italian and foreign suitors and behaving like overage sorority sisters. They hardly ever went to bed with anybody, not from fear of AIDS but from sheer contrariness, and they called each other late at night after dates and giggled. They cock-teased. Merope wondered occasionally how it was possible for fully employed grown women to act this way: did adolescence, like malaria, return in feverish flashbacks?

IN THE HOTEL

(3:17 A.M.)

Whirr. The invisible sponsored again by white
walls—a joining in them and then (dark spot)
(like the start of a thought)
a corner, fertilized by shadow, hooked, dotted,
here demurring, there—up there—
almost hot with black . . . What time is it?
The annihilation. The chaste middle of things.
Then I hear them, whoever they are, as if
inside my wall, as if there were a multitude of tiny wings
trapped
inside the studs and joints.
The clock dial hums. Greenish glow and twelve stark dots
round which this supple, sinewed, blackest flesh
must roil—vertebrate. A moaning now—a human moan—and then
another cry—but small—
furry in the way the wall can hold it—no
regret—a cry like a hypothesis—another
cry—the first again?—but not as in
dialogue—no—no question in it,
no having heard—now both—no moods in that room—
no fate—cries the precipitate of something on the verge of—
all of it supple now, threadbare in this black we share,
little whelps, vanquishings, discoveries, here under this
rock,
no, over here, inside this sky, or is it below?—paupers,
spoors—
a common grave—the backbone still glowing green—
and blackness, and the sense of walls, and the voicing they
provide, and my stillness here—unblinking—I am almost
afraid
to move—and the litheness of this listening—
gossipy murmuring syllables now rushing up the scales,
but not really toward, not really away,
as if the thing deepened without increase,
the weight of the covers upon me,
the weight of the black, the slack and heaving argument
of gravity—
and her, quavering, lingering—
and him—what had been mossy
suddenly clawed—
and everything now trying to arrive on time, ten thousand
invisible things all

THE same thought occurs to her again tonight in the restaurant garden, because she can feel the spring getting to her. After a cold wet April, warm weather has finally arrived, bringing wan flourishes of magnolia and sultry brown evenings heavy with industrial exhaust. The hordes of Fashion in town for the prêt-à-porter collections have been and gone like passenger pigeons, leaving in their wake not desolation but a faint genuine scent of pleasure. Tonight there is even a full moon: coming in the taxi from work, she caught a glimpse of it, big and shockingly red as a setting sun. Moons and other heavenly personages are rare in Milan: this one vanished under the smog by the time she reached the restaurant. Now between the potted hedge and the edges of the big white umbrellas overhead she sees only the cobblestones of Piazza del Carmine, a twilit church façade, and part of a big modern sculpture that looks like a Greek torso opened for autopsy.

Across the table, Clay is looking good in black. The man to Clay's right is obviously impressed. His name is Claudio, he is a Roman who lives half the time in Milan, and he owns shoe factories out in the mists beyond Linate: a labyrinthine artisanal conglomerate whose products, baptized with the holy names

braided in, fast—*appetite, the clatter of wheels upon tracks,*
the rustling—what did I lose?—what was it
like?—the weight of covers now upon me like the world's
shut lid,
shut fast—not opening—
and cries, and cries, and something that will not come true.
When I stand up, pulling the heavy bedclothes back,
I want to open up the black.
Water sounds in the pipes between us.
A raised voice. Some steps.
More water in the singing pipes.
And scuffling. And the clicking of their light going off...
Debris of silences inside the silence.
Black gorged with absences. Room like an eyelid
spanked open
wide, I rip it, I rip it further—as if inside it now the million
tiny slippages could go to work, the whistling
of absence
where the thing *should care for us*—
where justice shifts and reshifts the bits to make
tomorrow—
tirelessly—kingdom of scribble and linger.... What do you
want, *you*, listening here with me now? Inside the
monologue,
what would you insert? What word?
What mark upon the pleating blacknesses of hotel air?
What, to open it? To make it hear you. To make it hear me.
How heavy can the singleness become?
Who will hear us? What shall we do?
I have waited all this time in the sooty minutes,
green gleaming bouquet offering and offering itself
right to my unrelenting open eyes,
long black arm tendering its icy blossoms up to me,
right through the blizzard of instances, the blurry
blacknesses, the whole room choked with the thousand spots
my glance has struck—
Long ago, long ago, and then, secondhand, this place
which is now,
whirr—immortal? free?—glances like flames licking the walls...
Oh blackness, I am your servant. I take for mine your green, exactest
gift
in which you say yourself, in which you say
only yourself—

—JORIE GRAHAM

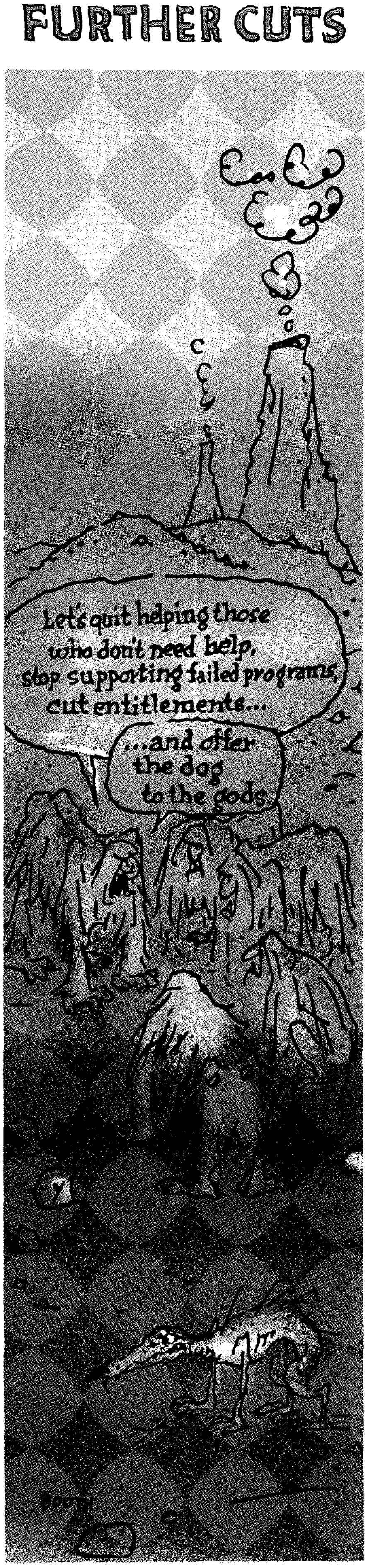
of the great designers, decorate shop-windows up and down Via Spiga and Via Montenapoleone. He's been making not awfully discreet pawing motions at Clay since they all met up at Baretto at eight-thirty. He is touching the huge gilt buttons of her jacket with feigned professional interest, and her hands and the tip of her nose with no excuse at all, and Clay is laughing and talking about her fiancé in Texas and brushing him off like a mosquito or maybe not even brushing him off but playing absentmindedly with him, the way a child uses a few light taps to keep a balloon dancing in the air.

The other men at the table are designed along the same lines as this Claudio, though one is Venetian and the other a true Milanese. All three are fortyish men-about-town whom Merope has been seeing at parties for the last two years: graying, tanned, with the beauty that profligate Nature bestows on Italian males northern or southern, of all levels of intelligence and social class. They are dressed in magnificent hybrid fabrics of silk and wool, and their faces hold the faintly wary expression of rich divorced men.

Like all the dinner companions Clay has provided recently, they are all impossible, for more reasons than Merope could list on a manuscript the length of the Magna Carta. Without having been out with them before, she knows from experience that soon they will begin vying with each other to pay for this dinner, will get up and pretend to visit the toilet but really go off to settle things with the headwaiter or to discover with irritation that one of the others pretending to visit the toilet has gotten there beforehand. When it has been revealed that someone has succeeded in paying, the other men will groan and laughingly take to task the beaming victor, who has managed to buy the contents of their stomachs.

The other woman at the table is Robin, the Colorado Christie's blonde from the train incident. She is pretty but borderline anorexic, with a disconcerting habit of jerking her head sharply to one side as she laughs. Clay uses her shamelessly to round out gatherings where another woman is wanted who won't be competition. Merope likes her but pities her because after five years in Italy she hasn't yet understood the mixture of playfulness and deep conservatism in Italian men and goes from one disastrous love affair to another. Just a few weeks ago, she spent a night shivering in a car in front of a house where her latest lover was dallying. Now she's looking hopefully around, as if she's eager to get burned again.

On the right side of Merope, the Venetian, Francesco, is recounting something that happened to him last month: a girl of about sixteen, a Polish immigrant who had been in the country only a few months, had bluffed her way in to see him in the offices of his knitwear business and without preamble pulled off her shirt. "She told me that she'd done a bit of lingerie modelling—you can imagine the body—but that she wasn't making enough money, and she proposed for me to keep her. Viewed with the greatest possible objectivity, *era una fica pazzesca*—she was an amazing piece of ass. She said that she


FURTHER CUTS
Let's quit helping those who don't need help, stop supporting failed programs, cut entitlements...
...and offer the dog to the gods.

didn't care about luxury, that she'd accept one room in any neighborhood, that she didn't dress couture, only Gaultier Junior, and that she rode a motorbike, so that her overhead costs would be very low. She used that expression: overhead costs."

"Well, what did you do?" demands Clay.

Francesco pauses to scrape a mussel from its shell, and then glances around the table with his shrewd, pale Venetian eyes. He seems pleased with the story and with himself. "I don't like complications, so I kept my head with extreme difficulty, made her put her shirt on, and sent her away. And lucky for her, not morally but practically, because a week ago I ran into her at the gala the Socialists gave at La Scala—covered with jewels, on the arm of old Petralzo the rug man, who must be seventy-five."

"Lucky girl," says Clay. "So she has minimum work for maximum compensation."

"It's an *inspiring* story," Merope says. "Even ideologically. When you think of her, born under Polish socialism, progressing to the Italian brand—"

A waiter dashes up and shows them an enormous boiled sea bass, lead-colored in the candlelight, and then runs off to bone it. Though they are all laughing, the story about the Polish girl has changed the atmosphere of the group, momentarily causing each one of them to envision the candlelit outdoor restaurant with its stylish diners as a temporary and unstable oasis of safety, an illuminated bubble poised at the murky edges of the chaos going on not far enough away to the East: the Wall toppled and strewn; teen-age Germans nonchalantly resuscitating the Third Reich; international mafiosi and ex-apparatchiks making pacts in the shadow of the Kremlin; Croats slicing heads off Montenegrins; Czech whores servicing the flights between Vienna and Prague; dissolution spilling over into the once safe and prosperous fields of Western Europe in the form of refugee hordes from every tattered state on earth. Each of the men at the table thinks of certain investments and says an inward prayer. The three American women experience a brief, simultaneous thrill of empathy with that coldhearted young girl, as foreign as they are.

Subdued, they finish off two bottles of Piedmontese red wine and eat the fish with thin flat salad greens called *barba di frate*—"friar's beard." Merope chats with the man on her left, who has a posh Milanese accent with a glottal "R" that sounds as if he's constantly clearing his throat. His name is Nicolò, and he agreeably surprises her by accepting without comment the fact that she is American of African-Caribbean ancestry—most Italians feel obliged to observe that she doesn't look American, as if one could—and that she actually works in advertising rather than at one of the jobs that many otherwise intelligent people in Milan consider the only possibility for a pretty young woman with skin the color of cedarwood: runway work, or shaking her behind in television ads for tropical juice.

She tells him that at work she has set herself the private task of trying to change attitudes and images, a generally futile ambition in a small Italian agency grateful for any accounts it can attract. Italians aren't natural racists, she explains, not like Americans, but they tend to view foreigners in a series of absurd roles as set as those of the commedia dell'arte. "It's funny, really. The last campaign we did for an air-conditioner, what the kids in the creative department held out for was two black models dressed as cannibals carrying the air-conditioner slung on a stick. Cannibals, can you imagine? Bare breasts, strings of teeth around their necks, little grass umbrellas around the hips. The company directors loved it. I screamed and yelled."

Nicolò smiles. "They must love *you.*"

"Well, I'm somewhat of a crown of thorns for them. But I provide comic relief."

She knows this Nicolò by sight; she has seen him at parties, always with a different oversized, underage beauty glued to his flank. He has even gone out with one of her friends, a lanky nineteen-year-old from Santo Domingo who is doing a lot of work for Armani this year. "Nicolò" she thinks of as a young name, impetuous, boyish, ardent, like the medieval revolutionary Cola di Rienzo, but this Nicolò is no boy. He has a head of bushy graying curls and weary, protuberant blue Lombard eyes with—surprising for a *viveur*—an expression of gentle, lugubrious sentimentality.

He is well dressed like the others, but his clothes seem slightly too big, giving him a curious orphaned air that must, thinks Merope unkindly, be the secret of his success with women. That and his money. He is the only one of the three who is not newly rich: his family has professors in it, and a famous collection of Futurist art, and people say he keeps up the textile business his great-grandfather started only to satisfy his taste for very young models. (In fact his eyes glistened mournfully at the description of the Polish girl.) It is said that he falls in love constantly, with untidy results.

He sits and talks about a big house in the Engadin Valley where his seventy-eight-year-old mother passes the winters making nutcake, skiing, hiking, fighting with the family board of directors via phone or fax.

"She sounds fantastic," Merope says. She tells him about her father's mother, Jazelle, a school principal with a taste for Plutarch as well as for a certain type of hot yellow-pepper sauce—a tall, rigid, iron-colored woman who commanded obedience from family and pupils in a whispering deadly Montserratian voice that both awed and embarrassed her Americanized grandchildren. It's just an impulse: her family is her own private thing that she doesn't usually talk about with the people Clay trots out.

"I don't understand what you're doing in Milan," he says.

"Well, I have to see the world. This is as good a place as any, maybe better."

Nicolò taps the base of his wineglass with his fingernail. "St. Augustine was converted in a garden here. I think that that was probably the last time this city has done anyone any good."

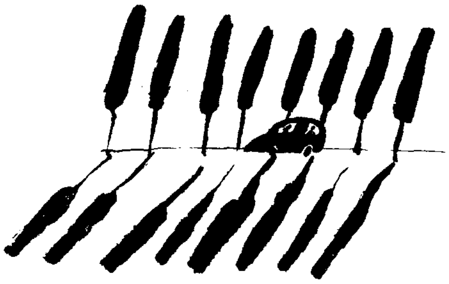
"I wonder where the garden was," says Merope.

Nicolò laughs and says it was a child's voice that spoke to Augustine in the garden, and that he is thinking at the moment that Merope has the face of a child who knows too much. She reminds him, he says, of Velázquez's Infanta Margarita. This is a nice compliment, but spoiled by being said in a self-satisfied, overly proficient manner that makes it clear that he habitually comes up with artistic comparisons to impress his very young models. It annoys Merope. She sees that he is quite interested, and this is puzzling, since she is not at all his type.

They are interrupted from across the table by Claudio the Roman shoemaker, who has heard them talking about the mountains. In between bouts of flirting outrageously with Clay, he starts reminiscing about a party given at Champfer in the sixties by a spendthrift cousin of Nicolò's. The cousin had wanted to tent a forest for his guests to dance in like gnomes, but this was against Swiss law, so he filled a tent with tall potted larches specially imported from Austria. At dawn the men, a black phalanx in evening dress, had descended from Corviglia on skis.

The two other men at the table chime in to exclaim nostalgically over how much time they spent in dinner jackets, their crowd of young blades, in the sixties. They were so stylish they never wore ski clothes even on ordinary days, but skied in three-piece suits, the wasp-waisted, flare-trousered sixties kind, with a high-collared shirt and a wide tie up under your chin. "We were dandies," sighs Francesco.

Clay says that they are still dandies, that it is a basic instinct of the Latin male to decorate himself. But are they still up to snuff physically, she asks in a rhetorical tone that makes Robin and Merope giggle. Tossing back her red fringe, she says she doubts it, and she commands without further ado that they show her their legs. Clay has an effect on men like a pistol held to the back of the neck: all three of them at the table—fathers of adult children and heads of companies—rise promptly from their places, considerably surprising the waiters and the other diners in the restaurant, and line up like naughty schoolboys in front of Clay, who, with a Circean smile, has swivelled in her chair to survey them. They pull up their trousers to reveal a variety of knobby, sock-covered ankles and calves. Clay keeps them standing there a second longer than necessary before pronouncing them acceptable and allowing them to file back to their dinners. "But you'll have to work on that musculature, gentlemen!" she says.



"Of course they behave this way because we're foreigners," Clay tells Merope a bit later in the ladies' room. Clay has a frequently voiced conviction that Italian men view foreign women as escape hatches, vacations from the immemorial stress of life with Italian women, who are all descendants of exigent Mediterranean earth goddesses.

"Italians are just intensified versions of men from anywhere," says Merope. "The real mystery, the riddle of the ages, is why we go to buttock class and put ourselves through severe pain for their benefit. Look at them—those bony legs!"

Merope is redoing her lips with a tint from a little pottery dish her ex-boyfriend brought her from Marrakech. Clay has left the toilet door open to talk to her and sits with her black skirt hiked up and her tights down, her chin propped on her hands and her elbows on her knees.

When Clay is washing her hands, they start talking about Claudio the shoemaker, who, as Merope accurately observes, has been making passes at Clay like a Roman café waiter with a schoolgirl on a junior year abroad. Clay, always merciful when one least expects it, declares that there is no real harm in poor Claudio, who is upset about having less money than his friends and about having had his business partner hauled off to prison last month as a result of the government bribery scandal.

"Well, if you're so sympathetic, you should cure him of that behavior," says Merope, dropping the Moroccan dish into her bag. "Why don't you act like his charm has caused you to lose your head, and grab him in front of everybody and kiss him. Stick your tongue in his mouth. That would scare the shit out of him. It might change his life. At the very least it would teach him some manners."

Clay says it isn't at all a bad idea, and when they are back at the table she actually does grab Claudio the shoemaker and give him a whammy of a kiss—a real bodice ripper, as she describes it later. She doesn't do it right away but

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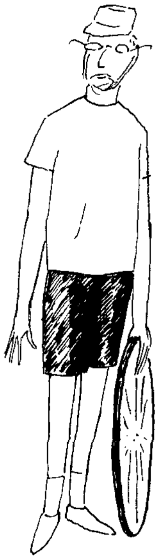
waits until they've had dessert and small cups of black coffee which intrude on the languid meal like jolts of pure adrenaline.



Merope sees Claudio reach out for the twentieth time and trail his fingers down Clay's cheek while he formulates yet another outrageous compliment, and she watches Clay laugh, turn to him, grab his shoulders, and give him a long, extremely kinetic kiss. They all stare, and Robin from Christie's claps her thin hands spontaneously like a child at the circus when the elephants come in. Clay lets Claudio go, and his face has blushed dark as a bruise. He is groping for an expression. The rest of them follow Robin and burst into applause, because there is nothing else to do, and people at other tables turn around to look.

"Brava, Clay! That's showing him," calls Francesco.

Clay herself is pale, but she has lost no equilibrium at all. She takes a sip of mineral water. "That was possible," she says evenly, without a smile, "only because with Claudio there could *never* be the possibility of anything more."

Shrieks of laughter, invocations of the Texas fiancé, loud protests from the men, especially from Claudio himself, who has enough of the Roman genius for saving face to cover his tracks—to court Clay still more flamboyantly, to laugh artlessly at himself. But the atmosphere, observes Merope, is momentarily murderous; at least, under the voices, through the candlelight diffused beneath the white umbrella, travels a dire reverberation like that which follows the first bite of an axe into a tree trunk. She herself feels half angry at Clay for taking her at her word, half full of unwilling admiration.

"So what do you think, precocious child?" Nicolò asks her a few minutes later, when Francesco reveals that he has paid the bill, and they all get up to leave.

"That precocious children come to bad ends," replies Merope.

The six of them take two cars to Piazza Sant'Ambrogio to visit Angela and Lucia, a pair of forty-year-old twins who design a sportswear line for Francesco. These sisters with first names like chambermaids are in fact members of an aboriginal Milanese noble family whose dark history of mailed fists and bloody political intrigues dominates medieval Lombard chronicles. The twins themselves, leftover scraps of a dynasty, are small, with masses of streaked hair and frail chirping voices like a pair of crickets; at parties they dress alike to annoy their friends. Tonight they are darting around in red and yellow bloomer suits in Lucia's apartment, which adjoins her sister's in a damp sixteenth-century palazzo with a view onto the church of Sant'Ambrogio. The two sisters boast that even during their marriages and love affairs they have rarely spent a night apart.

In the room where the guests are gathered, there are Man Ray photographs leaning against the baseboards, couches and poufs covered in sea-green damask, and a carved Malaysian four-poster bed; the windows look down into a leafy wilderness starred with white blossom—the kind of courtyard Merope had at first been surprised to find behind the pitted, smog-blackened façades of Milanese palazzi.

Merope detaches herself from Nicolò, who has been hovering since they got out of the car, and goes and sits down on a wobbly pouf beside a handsome Indian designer who works with one of the twins. The designer's name is Nathaniel, and he is talking emotionally about Cole Porter to a large, round Englishman whom Merope remembers chiefly for the fact that in the summer he bounces around the city in the most beautiful white linen suits, like a colonial governor on holiday.

"My mother," continues Nathaniel, "used to sit down at the piano at sunrise with a pitcher of cold tea beside her and start in with 'Night and Day.' It's very peculiar sensation, Cole Porter in Delhi at dawn." He passes one hand over his forehead as if to dispel an unbearable memory and then props his elbow on Merope's shoulder. "Hello, chum," he says. "You look appetizing tonight."

Merope pushes his elbow off and smiles. She likes Nathaniel, who is a friend of her boss, Maria Teresa. He asks her about work, and she tells him about the most interesting thing she is doing these days, which is a free-lance project writing scripts for a video series on the fantasies of top models.

"Oho," interjects the round Englishman.

"Well, it's not as hot as it sounds. These are the kind of fantasies most women have at the age of eleven. The sex is all submerged. One of the girls, Russian, really gorgeous, dreams of being Catherine the Great—"

"I don't call that submerged," protests Nathaniel. "Think of her and the horse."

Merope tells him that the horse is a myth and that anyway the video limits itself to onion domes and fur-edged décolletage. Then she describes another video, in which the model fantasizes about being a Mafia princess, climbs out of a black Mercedes with an Uzi in her hand while the voice-over observes that she has looks to kill for.

The two men giggle, and then the Englishman asks Merope about Ivo, her Dutch ex-boyfriend. When she says that she left him almost a year ago, he leans toward her looking simultaneously lascivious and avuncular and says, "I hope you haven't gone over to the wops. My child," he goes on, "I have a definite paternal concern for your romantic future. Too many nice girls come over here and get flummoxed by the Eyetalians. Bad situation—very, as Mr. Jingle would say. Because, all indications of myth and popular tradition to the contrary, the Italian—"

"Is the most difficult male on the planet," interjects Nathaniel, with the happy air of one climbing onto an old and beloved hobbyhorse.

"That stands, though I was about to say conservative," says the Englishman. "Difficult, because with the Asian, the African male—"

"Don't forget the Indian," adds Nathaniel.

"You know where you are," says the Englishman. "And one expects behavior along primitive authoritarian lines. But the Italian has a veneer of modernity that makes him infinitely more dangerous. Underneath the flashy design is a veritable root system of archaic beliefs and primitive loyalties. In Milan it's better hidden—that's all."

Getting excited, he waves across the room at, of all people, Nicolò, possibly

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because he's seen him come in with Merope. "Just pick an example! One look at him and the discerning eye sees not just an overdressed example of the Riace bronzes but an apartment! Yes, behind every Milanese playboy lurks an immense, dark, rambling bourgeois apartment in the Magenta district, with garlands on the ceiling and the smell of generations of pasta in *brodo*—oh, that *brodo!*—borne to the table by generations of maidservants with mustaches.

"And the tribal life in these apartments—all-powerful mothers, linen closets, respectful tradesmen presenting yearly bills, respectful priests subtly skimming the household wealth, ceremonial annual removals to the mountains and the sea, young men and young wives slowly suffocating, gold clinking in coffers to a rhythm that says, family, family, family."

He fixes Merope with a sparkling periwinkle eye. "One grows up in one of these miniature purgatories with a sense of sin ingrained in one's cells—a sense that human compromise and human corruption are inevitable. It's the belief at the root of all the wickedness in this city—and this is a very wicked city. Wicked in a silly and not even very interesting way. An exotic American like you can't comprehend the weight of it."

Presumptuous old donkey, thinks Merope, who has been looking around and only half listening. It would be nice to get through an evening out without hearing the word "exotic." "I have a family, too," she says, distinctly.

"It's eminently clear that you are a sheltered and highly educated flower of the New World, and that makes you more vulnerable." He points to Clay. "That's the kind of girl who gets on in Italy: hit and run."

Clay is standing across the room talking to one of the twins. Unlike anyone else, she looks better as the night wears on: her eyes and earrings gleam and she seems more voluptuous, whiter, redder, more emphatic. By her side hovers Claudio the shoemaker, who has not left her since she gave him that kiss. If he was annoyingly forward in his behavior before the event, now he is desperate.

"Yes, that intelligent young woman has had the good sense to hook up with a cattle baron and get the hell out."

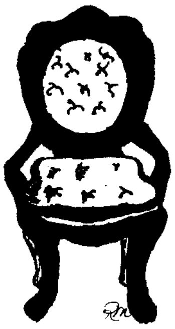
"You sound jealous," says Merope.

"Oh, extremely," says the Englishman. "But it's too late for me."

"At this point we're fixtures," sighs Nathaniel.

One of the twins darts over and compliments Merope on the wonderful new shoes she has on, which are black with straps, and this somehow gets everyone talking about the British Royal Family, since Nathaniel claims to have heard on reliable authority that what the Prince of Wales really desires in his troubled marriage is straps, plenty of them, but that the Princess declines to oblige.

Clay waltzes up and plops down on the Englishman's lap, nearly knocking him over; meanwhile they start discussing a new conspiracy theory that links the Queen with the latest Mafia executions in Palermo. They go on to the fiasco of the AIDS benefit gala held the previous week at the Sforza Castle, where a freak storm fried the outdoor lights and nearly electrocuted an international crowd of celebrities. After that they argue over the significance of the appearance of a noted art critic on a late-night television sex show hosted by a beautiful hermaphrodite. Then they thoroughly dissect the latest addendum to the sensational divorce case of a publishing magnate: his wife's claim that he violated her with a zucchini and then served his friends the offending vegetable as part of a risotto.



Nicolò has come over and sat down on the arm of a couch next to Merope, and through all the laughter she feels him watching her. Under cover of everyone else's chatter, he leans over and says, "I have to fly to New York the day after tomorrow. Do you want to come with me?"

She rises and moves away from the rest of the group toward the window, and he follows her. Then she stands still and looks directly at him. "I don't think you are really interested in me," she says. "I'm not your type at all—not extraordinarily young, not tall, not beautiful at the professional level you like. And I have a personality. An attitude, though you can't possibly know what that means. So the question is why you are behaving this way: To keep your hand in? To practice for the Third World models?"

He reddens, but not as much as he should, and apologizes. He admits he's been horribly clumsy but says she's being too hard on him. The fact is that she's different from the women he usually meets, and that has thrown him off base. He should have guessed—

"I go to New York quite often for work," Merope interrupts pitilessly. "You offered me a trip like someone offers stockings to a little refugee. Offer it to that Polish girl who came into Francesco's office, the one who took off her shirt. I could see that got you excited."

He reddens some more, rubs his right eye with a nervous forefinger, but he is not, she sees, displeased; on the contrary, he is liking this intensely. What's going on, she thinks, that all the men want us to tread on them? Even the poor old Prince of Wales likes a spanking. From across the room Clay winks at her as if she knows what she's thinking, and Merope feels suddenly tired.

Francesco has helped one of the twins put together a batch of *sgropin*, the vodka-and-lemon-sherbet mixture Venetians drink after heavy meals; when Merope sits down again the others are sipping it from *spumante* glasses and continuing to chatter away at the top of their lungs, now about telepathy and magic.

Clay talks about a friend of hers in Rome who can call you up on the phone and tell you the colors of the clothes you are wearing at that moment. One of the twins describes the master wizard from Turin, Gustavo Rol, who in his heyday in the nineteen-fifties would tell you to select any book from your library, turn to a page you chose, and there would be his name, written in an unearthly handwriting. Francesco tells of his uncle who, while living in a huge old villa on the Brenta, had a dream one night that an unknown woman instructed him to lock a slab of limestone into a small storage room and throw away the key. The uncle obeyed the dream, and when he and his family broke down the door a day later, they found the slab engraved with the words "*Siete tutti maledetti*"—"You are all cursed."

These dismal words don't directly end the party, yet no one manages to stay around much after they are spoken. People go off for a drink at Momus, or to watch the latest crop of models dance at the eternal model showcase, Nepentha. Some go home, since there is no shame in this in the last, frugal years of the millennium. Clay does one of her fast bunks, adroit as usual at collapsing with exhaustion when she feels bored; hissing to Merope that she'll call her later to rehash, she slips into a taxi that no one knew she had called. She leaves Claudio the shoemaker on the sidewalk with a peck on the cheek. From the corner of her eye Merope observes him standing, just standing as the taxi whisks off. He looks suddenly two-dimensional, as if his stuffing has all fallen out. "Marsyas flayed, eh?" says the Englishman, from over Merope's shoulder. "I told you she was an expert."

Nicolò offers to drive Merope home, and she says yes. Which leaves her walking toward the car at 1 A.M. through the ancient center of Milan with a man who doesn't attract her, whom she doesn't want to try to understand. What strange glue has them still stuck together?

UNDER their feet the worn paving stones are slippery with damp, and from gardens hidden behind the smog-blackened portals of the old palaces comes a breath of earth and leaves and cat pee. Occasionally they pass a doorway littered with disposable syringes, but they see no one—no addicts and no lovers. Approaching is the quietest hour of the night, the hour when the unchanging character of the city emerges from the overlay of traffic and history.

Their footsteps echo on the walls of the narrow streets with a late-night sound that Merope thinks must be peculiar to Milan, as each city in the world has its own response to night voices and footfalls. As if her scolding had pushed a button that vaporized inhibitions, Nicolò has been talking steadily since they said goodbye to the others and he continues after they have gotten into his big leather-lined car, where the doors make a heavy prosperous sound when they slam, like a vault closing.

He talks about his estranged wife, whom he has never quite been able to divorce, about the excellence of her family, a pharmaceutical dynasty from Como, about her religion, about her

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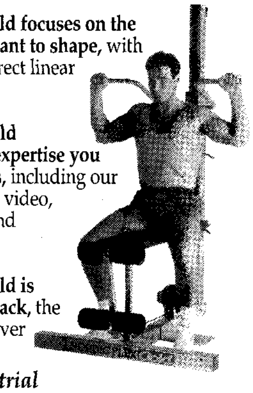

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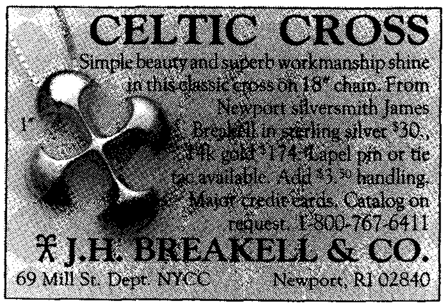

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well-bred pipe-stem legs below the Scottish tartan skirts she favored in the nineteen-seventies, about how her problem with alcohol began. He talks about how until a certain age a man goes on searching for a woman to heal who-knows-what wound; until some afternoon one looks up from scanning a document and realizes that one has stopped searching and how that realization is the chief disaster one faces. He talks about his son, who is with Salomon Brothers in London, and his daughter, in her last year at Bocconi; he asks Merope how old she is.

"Twenty-eight." She says it with careless emphasis, knowing that it is too old for his tastes, that probably one of the most intense pleasures he allows himself is the moment he learns definitively how young, how dangerously young, is the girl at his side. It heightens her sense of power, not to be to his taste, and yet there is something companionable in it. Any tiredness she felt has passed: she feels beautiful and in control, sustained by her little black dress with its boned bodice as if by a sheath of magic armor.

On impulse she asks him not to take her immediately home but to drive out of town and follow the canal road toward Pavia first so they can have a look at the rice fields, which are flooded now for the spring planting. To get to the Pavese canal they cut through the neighborhood near Parco Sempione where the transvestite and transsexual whores do business. It's late for the whores, whose peak hour for exhibiting themselves on the street is midnight, but those who are not already with clients or off the job go into their routine when they see the lights of Nicolò's car. Variously they shimmy and stick out their tongues, bend over cupping their naked silicone breasts, turn their backs and wag their bare bottoms.

They are said to be the best-dressed streetwalkers in Italy, and certainly in fast glimpses they all look gorgeous, fantastically costumed in string bikinis and garter belts, stockings and high heels, with their original sex revealed only by the width of their jaws and the narrowness of their hips. All together they resemble a marooned group of Fellini extras. One of them is wrapped in a Mephistophelian red cloak that swirls over nipples daubed with phosphorescent makeup; another is wearing a tight silver Lycra jumpsuit with a cutout exposing bare buttocks that remind Merope, inevitably, of the *Glutei* class.

Nicolò slows down the car to allow the two of them a good look, and makes a weak joke about urban nocturnal transportation services. He tells Merope that the transvestites are nearly all Yugoslavs or Brazilians, something she already knows. With Clay and other friends she has driven around to see them a number of times after dinner; only now, however, does she consider what life must be like for these flamboyant night birds, foreigners to a country, foreigners to a gender, skilled but underappreciated workers in a profession that makes them foreigners to most of the rest of the world.

She can see that Nicolò is eying them with the veiled expression that men adopt when with a woman companion they look at whores, and this fills her with friendly amusement. She's starting to feel slightly fond of him, in fact, old Nicolò. His overlong curls, the superb quality of the fabric of his jacket, his anguish, even his timid taste for adolescents are all, as the Englishman said, parts of a certain type of equation. It has to do not only with vast gloomy apartments with plaster garlands but also with escapes from that world—endless futile escapes with the returns built right in. Nicolò, she knows, would like her to be one of his escapes. He's not brave enough for the transvestites.

They reach the Naviglio Pavese and drive along the canal toward the periphery of the city, past the darkened restaurant zone and the moored barges full of café tables, the iron footbridges and the few clubs with lights still lit. Nicolò continues to talk: spurred by her silence, he starts improvising, gets a bit declarative. He is confessing to her that he is tired of young models and wild evenings. Even tonight, with that kiss— He has nothing against her friend Clay, who is a fascinating woman, but there is something about her— In any case, at a certain time one wants a woman one can introduce to one's children, one's mother. He personally could never involve himself seriously with a woman who— The minute he saw Merope he sensed that, though they were so different, there was a possibility—

They pass through the periphery of Milan: factories, government housing, and hapless remnants of village life swallowed by the city. Then suddenly they are among the rice fields that stretch outside of Pavia. Beside them the sober gleam of the still canal stretches into the distance, and to the right and the left of the empty two-lane road is a magical landscape of water, divided by geometric lines. It could be anywhere: South Carolina, China, Bali. And there is light on the water, because once they are beyond the city limits the moon appears. Not dramatically—as full moons sometimes bound like comic actors onto the scene—but as a woman who has paused unseen at the edge of a group of friends at a party calmly enters the conversation.

The sight of the moon dissolves the flippant self-confidence Merope caught from Clay, which carried her through dinner and the party. She looks down at her bare knees emerging like polished wood from black silk, shifts her body in the enveloping softness of the leather seat and feels not small, as such encounters with celestial bodies are supposed to make one feel, but simply in error. Out of step.

Once, four or five years ago, on vacation in Senegal, she and her sister sneaked out of Club Med and went to a New Year's Eve dance in the town gymnasium and a local boy led her onto the floor, where a sweating, ecstatic crowd was surging in an oddly decorous rhythm of small, synchronized stops and starts; and in those beautiful African arms she'd taken one step and realized that it was wrong. And not just that the step was wrong in itself but that it led to a whole chain of wrong steps and that she—who had assumed she was the heiress of the entire continent of Africa—couldn't for the life of her catch that beat. Sitting now in this car, where she has no real desire or need to be, she experiences a similar dismay. She feels that a far-reaching mistake has been made, not now but long ago, as if she and Nicolò and Clay and the other people she knows are condemned to endless repetitions of a tiresome antique

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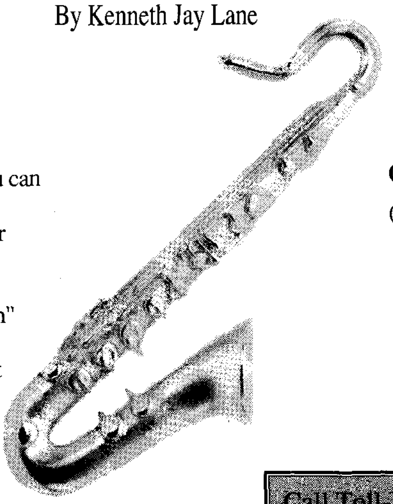

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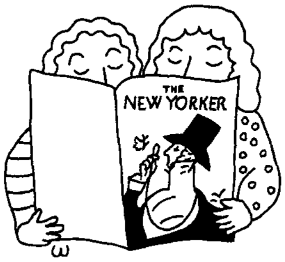

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blunder to which the phlegmatic moon continues to bear witness.

"I think it's time to go back now," she says, breaking into whatever Nicolò is confessing; then she feels unreasonably annoyed by the polite promptness with which he falls silent, makes a U-turn, and heads toward the city. For a second she wishes intensely that something would happen to surprise her. She sees it in a complete, swift sequence, the way she dreams up those free-lance scripts: Nicolò stops the car, turns to her, and bites her bare shoulder to the bone. Or an angel suddenly steps out on the road, wings and arm outstretched, and explains each of them to the other in a kindly, efficient bilingual manner, rather like a senior U.N. interpreter. From the radio, which has been on since they reached the canal road, comes a fuzz of static and a few faint phrases of Sam Cooke's "Cupid." Merope looks down at her hands in her lap and when she looks up again they are passing an old farmhouse set close to the road: one of the rambling brick peasant *cascine*, big enough for half a dozen families, that dot the Bassa Padana lowlands like fortresses. Even at night it is clear that this place is half in ruins, but as they pass by she sees a figure standing in front and gives an involuntary cry.

Nicolò has good reflexes and simply slows the car without bringing it to a halt. "What is it?"

"There was someone standing in front of that *cascina*—it looked like a woman holding a child."

"That's not impossible. Some of these big abandoned houses close to the city have been taken over by squatters. Foreigners, again: Albanians, Filipinos, Moroccans, Somalians, Yugoslav Gypsies. What I'm afraid we're facing is a new barbarian invasion."

She hardly notices what he says, because she is busy trying to understand what she saw back in front of the old farmhouse, whose walls, she realizes with delayed comprehension, seemed to have been festooned with spray-paint graffiti like a Bronx subway stop, like an East London squat. The figure she saw in the moonlight could have been a wild-haired woman holding a baby but could just as easily have been a man with dreadlocks cradling something else: a bundle, a small dog. The clothing of the figure was indeterminate, the skin definitely dark, the face an oval of shadow. Thinking of it and remembering her thoughts beforehand, she feels an absurd flash of terror, from which she quickly pulls back.

You aren't drunk, she tells herself in her mother's most commonsense tone, and you have taken no dicey pharmaceuticals, so stop worrying yourself at once. Just stop. When Nicolò notices that she is shaken up and asks if she is feeling all right, Merope says she is overtired and leaves it at that. She is sorry she cried out: it makes it seem that the two of them have shared some dangerous intimate experience.

BACK in Milan they go speeding along the deserted tram tracks, and the moon disappears behind masses of architecture. Merope wants above all things to be back in her apartment, in her own bed, under the ikat quilt her ex-boyfriend made for her. She has to drive to Bologna for a meeting tomorrow afternoon and in the morning has a series of appointments for which, she thinks, she will be about as alert as a hibernating frog. By the time they are standing outside the thick oak carriage doors of her apartment house, in Via Francesco Sforza, her fit of nerves has passed.

Nicolò, looking a bit sheepish after the amount he has said, invites her to have dinner next week.

"I can't see how that would help either one of us," replies Merope, but she says it without the malicious energy of earlier that evening. In fact she says it as a joke, because she doesn't really mind him anymore. She doesn't give him her number, but she knows he'll get it from Clay or from someone else, and this knowledge leaves her so unmoved that for a minute she is filled with pity, for him and probably for herself as well. Without adding anything she kisses him on both cheeks and then lets the small, heavy pedestrians' door close between them.

Then she takes off her shoes and in her stocking feet runs across the cold, slippery paving stones of the courtyard into her wing of the building. She steps into the old glass-and-wooden elevator, careful not to bang the double doors and awaken Massimo the porter, who sleeps nearby. As she goes up she feels the buzzing mental clarity that comes from exhaustion. In the back of her mind have risen the words from the ghost story at the party, the baleful pronouncement engraved on a stone slab: "*Siete tutti maledetti.*" And for a few seconds she finds herself laboring over that phrase, attempting with a feverish automatic kind of energy to fix it—to substitute a milder word for "cursed"—as she might correct a bad line of copy.

The phone is ringing as she lets herself into the apartment, and she grins as she picks it up: Clay is worse than a dorm mother.

"What if I decide to go to bed with somebody?" she says into the phone.

"You won't—not with him, anyway. You're not the charitable type," says Clay. She gives a loud yawn: she's probably been lying there talking to the Texan, who calls every night. "I just wanted to make sure you made curfew."

"What time is curfew at this school?"

"Oh, around noon the next day."

"Clay, shame on you. You kissed that man."

"There was no man there. It was a trick of lighting."

They start giggling, egg each other on. For the first time that night Merope is having fun; courage warms her and the dreadlocked apparition by the farmhouse steps back into whatever waiting room in the imagination is reserved for catchpenny roadside omens. A few months later, she will discover that this was the night she decided to stop living in Italy; that here, in a small burst of instinct, began her transition to somewhere else. But at this moment on the bare edge of a new day in Milan, only one image comes to mind: herself and Clay in evening dresses out of a thirties film, foxtrotting together like two Ginger Rogerses around and around an empty piazza. Full of bravado, they laugh funky American bad-girl laughter as they dance; they whirl faster until they outrun gravity and start to rise over the worn gray face of the city, their satin skirts spinning out in a white disk that tosses casual light down on factories and streetcar lines, on gardens, palaces, and the bristling spires of the Duomo.

Merope sits down on the bed and wedges the phone between her shoulder and ear. "Did you see the moon?" she asks. ♦

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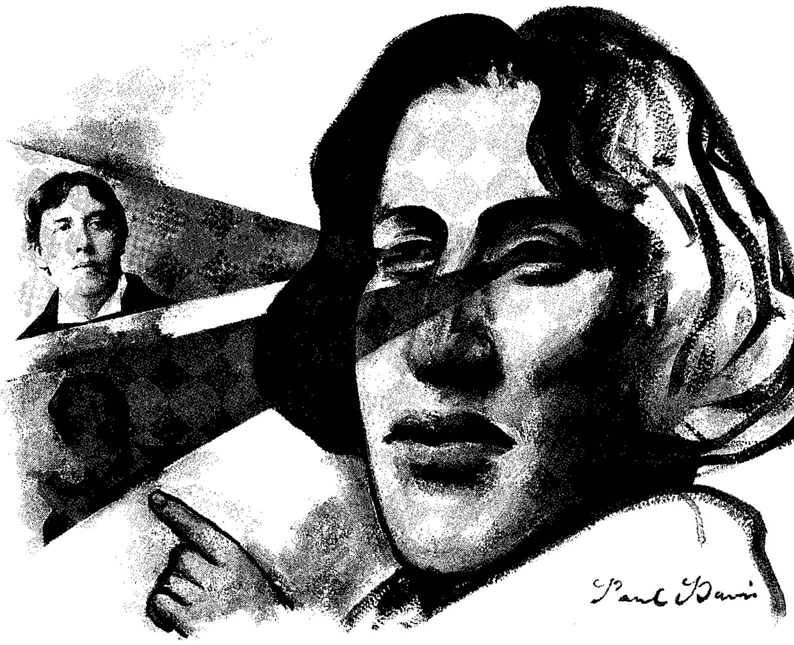
WILDE OATS

BY JOHN LAHR

When Oscar Wilde was sent to prison, in the spring of 1895, his two plays on the West End—"An Ideal Husband" and "The Importance of Being Earnest"—were withdrawn, in the delirium of public outrage. Nearly a century later, with the fin of our siècle in sight, those two plays are back on London's West End—"An Ideal Husband" directed by Sir Peter Hall and "The Importance of Being Earnest" souped up with the presence of Dame Maggie Smith as Lady Bracknell, and with the team of Nicholas Hytner and Bob Crowley, who recently gave "Carousel" such a stimulating reinterpretation, matching Wilde's boldness with their own. Seen together, these challenging productions bear witness to Wilde's intellectual daring and to his vivacious struggle to give his anarchic playfulness proper theatrical form.

"No country produces . . . such silly, vulgar plays as England," Wilde said in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." In his three-and-a-half-year career as a professional playwright (1892-95), he contributed his share of verse dramas to this pool of mediocrity. But he found commercial success in marrying the intellectual anarchy of his epigrams to the emotional decorum of Victorian melodrama. In his comedy-melodramas, the plot lines allowed him to keep his instinct for the highfalutin at bay, and gave him a structure on which to hang his epigrams. "I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or the sonnet," he wrote from prison.

In Hall's version of "An Ideal Husband" (at the Globe), Martin Shaw, as Lord Goring, is padded out to look and deport himself like Wilde. This is a liberty entirely in keeping with the text, where Lord Goring is cut exactly to Wilde's measurements. ("A flawless dandy," the stage directions read. "He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage.") Dandies dare with tact: what their rebellion wants is not to reject society but to force society to accept them on their own terms. Lord Goring, like Wilde, is a dandy whose very presence teases the puritan age's aesthetic principles and its notions of utility. "Has my good-for-nothing young son been here?" says Lord Caversham before Lord Goring makes his swank entrance. Carl Toms' gilded set, with a behemoth commemorative medal of Queen Victoria hanging down as the curtain rises, creates at a stroke the world of overweening power and materialism of nineteenth-century England, which was the target of Wilde's dandyism. Onto this backdrop of privilege, as in all his comedies, Wilde projects the drama of a guilty secret whose revelation threatens "public disgrace, ruin, terrible shame, the mockery of the world, a lonely, dishonoured life, a lonely, dishonoured death," as the impeccable Sir Robert Chiltern—a distinguished politician guilty in earlier years of selling government information for his own substantial gain—says of his



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imagined doom. This, of course, foreshadows Wilde's doom—one around which all his comedies perpetually danced. Sir Robert, who is being blackmailed, can save either his political life or his reputation for purity in the eyes of Lady Chiltern, who believes that "circumstances should never alter principles!" Against Sir Robert's hand-wringing moral quandary, Wilde contrasts the dandy's sang-froid, the embodiment of the calm he associated with the display of "perfect personality": "one who is not wounded, or maimed, or worried, or in danger." Lord Goring, like Wilde, is never at a loss in public. His paradoxical wit is the solvent that dissolves absolutes and calls into question the righteousness of idealism:

> —Falsehoods [are] the truths of other people.
> —Nobody is incapable of doing a foolish thing. Nobody is incapable of doing a wrong thing.
> —The English can't stand a man who is always saying he is in the right, but they are very fond of a man who admits that he has been in the wrong.
> —Everything is dangerous, my dear fellow. If it wasn't so, life wouldn't be worth living.

"The greatest interest lies between the lines," André Gide, who knew Wilde, said of his work. Hall's achievement is to make us feel, under the dialogue, Wilde bravely trying to engineer an atmosphere of tolerance by using laughter to cajole the public into accepting—even honoring—the dark side of human nature. This is shrewdly emphasized in Toms' set by a large upstage mirror that distorts the elegant silhouettes of the upright downstage figures. As Wilde knew in himself, and dramatized in others, like Sir Robert Chiltern, good can come out of sin. Onstage, Lord Goring negotiates a truce with reality and manages a conventional happy ending even for himself: he is accepted in marriage on his own terms by Mabel Chiltern (Victoria Hasted, making an impressive West End début). "An ideal husband!" she says, bridling at the thought of purity. "It sounds like something in the next world." Her last words, which are for the benefit of Lord Goring, are "He can be what he chooses"—a daydream of freedom for which Wilde himself fought and finally lost his life.

EVEN in "An Ideal Husband," though, the playfulness of Wilde's wit is at odds with melodrama's schematic structure. Wilde's laughter defied gravity, but the stage pictures were earthbound. Only his gossamer "The Importance of Being Earnest," where his inspired frivolity found a proper physical form, really lived up to his claims of theatrical greatness. Light comedy made an asset of his literary limitations. His gift was for generalization, not characterization, sharp stage dialogue, not stage pictures; presentation, not penetration. In the original, more conventional four-act version, finance, not frivolity, inspired Algy's pursuit of Cecily. But once frivolity had become the play's driving force, in the final three-act version, Wilde's wit acquired a new and exhilarating amperage, which allowed him to mock the stereotypes and conventions in which he'd previously traded. He had stumbled onto a form as mischievous and artificial as his imagination—a form in which life as well as language could be turned upside down. It transformed a punishing world into a playground. Role-playing was Wilde's lifelong manic defense, and, like Algy's "Bunburying" and Jack's imaginary "Uncle Ernest," it put him on a different footing with the world and allowed him politely to defy the rules of social conduct. His frivolity was both a mask and an admission of his pain. "I shunned sorrow and suffering of every kind," he wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas from prison, when the game was over and he was characterizing himself as a "zanie of sorrow." He went on, "I hated both. I resolved to ignore them as far as possible, to treat them, that is to say, as modes of imperfection." Inscribed on Wilde's tombstone in Père Lachaise cemetery, in Paris, where he was moved nine years after he died, in 1900, at the age of forty-six, are his own words:

For his mourners will be outcast men
And outcasts always mourn.

The fierce and unrelenting frivolity of "The Importance of Being Earnest," which coincided with the turmoil of

Wilde's private life, displaced his anxiety and was itself a kind of mourning. Matching Wilde's word pictures with bold stage pictures is the impish game that Bob Crowley plays, to stunning effect, in his design for Hytner's version of "The Importance of Being Earnest" (at the Aldwych). Each of his first two sets tilts dramatically in opposite directions—like the setup of a Wilde epigram—and the third factors out into a surprising and delightful balance. "I tried to parallel the surrealism of the play, the artificiality of it," Crowley told me recently. "Algy's room, for instance, is turned on its head, like the language." In Crowley's hands, Algy's place on Half Moon Street, the set for Act I, is a louche pad (Half Moon Street being near Shepherd's Walk, which was, and still is, a parade ground for prostitutes). "It's a place that Lady Bracknell would find rather daring and not comfortable," said Crowley, who has never before designed a drawing-room comedy. "A place she looks alien in and which she can disapprove." The walls are painted club green and carmine—emblematic of the Edwardian homosexual code and of heterosexual passion, respectively—and are dominated by John Singer Sargent's swagger portrait of Graham Robertson, a theatrical designer who was thought to be the inspiration for Dorian Gray, rising stage left like some lopsided and elegant window. Act II, which takes place on Jack's country estate, is played out against a topiary peacock whose gigantic tail rises stage right and through which doors have been cut, so that we can see in the distance a formal garden and a manor house. In Act III, set in the sunroom of the manor house, a series of straw hats on a white wall leads the eye to a vanishing point center stage, so that as the comedy resolves its contradictory perspectives the set does, too. By sweeping away the Victorian clutter in which the play is usually staged, the design's abstraction forces the intellectual structure underneath Wilde's epigrams into bolder relief.

"Modern life is complex and relative," Wilde wrote in "De Profundis." "To test reality we must see it on the tightrope." Jack and Algy walk this tightrope. Through them and their heartless game, Wilde admitted his own dissimulation and mercilessly disabused the audience of its convictions. "The good ended hap-

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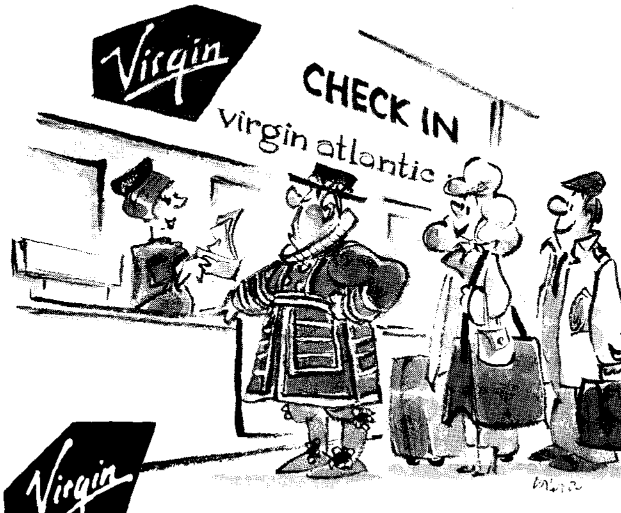

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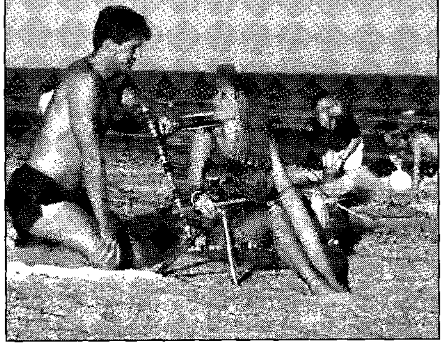

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pily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means," Miss Prism says to Cecily. And Gwendolen says to Jack, who is posing as Ernest, "We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits I am told: and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest." The play, which is almost giddy with confusions, is also giddy with Wilde's skepticism, and elevates it to philosophical statement. Nothing in the play proves certain except uncertainty. The snobbish Lady Bracknell turns out to be an arriviste; the demure Miss Prism has a history of scandal; the "orphaned" Jack is Algernon's elder brother. In these farcical twists Wilde showed truth becoming a lie and, in the case of Jack's use of Ernest as his *nom de folie*, lie becoming truth. In Wilde's ruthless, amoral mirth, the first note of modern comedy was sounded.

In this production, the true comic note is sounded by Dame Maggie Smith, who puts paid to the folk memory of Dame Edith Evans' fluting "A hand-bag!" by throwing away the line, and, with her nasal inflections, situating the character correctly as a suburban parvenue, not as an upper-class dragon. Maggie Smith is a great comic player, whose presence alone would be worth the price of admission, and she hits the music of Wilde's jokes with just the right dopey bravado. "There's a relentless focus on the word she's given to say," Nicholas Hytner says of Smith. "She's never happy. She always reckons there's something more. She's always in the book." Smith fills every stage moment with exact and hilarious observation. "Style," she says in a moment of pinched refinement, "largely depends on the way the chin is worn." Her Lady Bracknell legislates with her chin: pointing it in grandeur, dropping it in calculation, and withdrawing it in indignation. When she discovers Jack on his knees proposing marriage to her daughter, Gwendolen, her chin seems to disappear in disapproval until she is all bulging eyes. "Mr. Worthing!" she says, in one of Wilde's most delicious lines. "Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture."

In theatre, as in cooking, success depends on the balance and quality of the ingredients. Here Wilde's comic soufflé, while piquant, doesn't quite rise to the height it should, because, despite Hytner's shrewd interpretation, the chemistry of some of the actors throws the production off kilter. The appealing Richard E. Grant, who does so well in films like "The Player" and "Withnail and I," looks and sounds the part of Algy. But Grant, who can be bitchy, is not brazen, and this skews the competition between Algy and Jack, whose petulance and public-school sniffiness are memorably captured by Alex Jennings. The women, too, seem unevenly matched. Claire Skinner's bright-eyed innocence defines Cecily exactly, and Margaret Tyzack adds spice to the proceedings with her knowing but understated delivery of Miss Prism's great boffs, but Susannah Harker's Gwendolen shies from the daftness of the character.

"To have a style so gorgeous that it conceals the subject is one of the highest achievements," Wilde said. He accomplished this brilliantly in "The Importance of Being Earnest," while admitting more of himself than in any other play. And it's to the credit of Hytner and the clarity of his production that we feel under its relentless gaiety the desperation that fed Wilde's comic daring. Wilde parodied the notion of happy endings while providing one for the paying customers:

> JACK: Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?
>
> GWENDOLEN: I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

For Wilde, things changed abruptly. In the week "The Importance of Being Earnest" opened, he received the infamous misspelled calling card from Lord Queensberry accusing him of being a "somdomite." The moment of his greatest comic triumph was the beginning of his downfall. He could have left the country after the first libel trial yielded evidence of his homosexual activity, but chose to stay and fight in two subsequent trials. When he was asked why, Wilde, a skeptic in cap and bells, fell back for an explanation on *his* ideal. "I decided," he said, "it was nobler and more beautiful to stay." ♦

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VILLE ET VILLAGE

THE THEATRE

GIFTS OF GAB

BY EDITH OLIVER

THE late news first. The musical adaptation of "Wings" is so haunted (for me, that is) by Arthur Kopit's play, in all its strength and clarity, and by the radiant performance of Constance Cummings, fifteen years ago, as a former aviator felled by a stroke, that it took me a while to realize that Jeffrey Lunden's distinguished score is anything but a distraction, that Arthur Perlman's book and lyrics stay faithful to Kopit's purpose, and, above all, that Linda Stephens is almost a worthy successor to Miss Cummings. The result is a most agreeable evening at the Public, birthplace of the original production. At the beginning, the aviator is seated by an old-fashioned Victrola, playing some old record and lip-synching the words; there is a strange noise and a crash, and we go to black. She wakes up in a hospital. The woman is aphasic, it turns out, and most of the subsequent action is in her consciousness, to which we have access through her songs.

Her therapist, meanwhile, tries to teach her to speak again, and as the woman gets better her memory becomes clearer and more vivid. At one point, she sings and struts on the wing of a plane, recalling a daredevil aerial exhibition long ago. She finally gets her language back when the therapist puts something in her hand and, in a triumphal moment, the word for it comes to her: "snow"! The music echoes the triumph, and ends in dazzling harmony.

The production, under Michael Maggio's direction, is excellent. Linda Buchanan's abstract scenery and projections are brought to mysterious, dynamic life by Robert Christen's crisscross lighting. Birgit Rattenborg Wise designed the appropriate costumes. Most admirable in the admirable supporting company are Ross Lehman, as a fellow-patient, and Hollis Resnik, as the therapist.

I CAN think of no more gifted impersonator in the theatre than that fine English actor Roy Dotrice, whose Bernard Shaw in "The Best of Friends," at the Westside, stands shoulder to shoulder with his John Aubrey of sainted memory. The play was fashioned by Hugh Whitemore from the letters of Shaw to Dame Laurentia McLachlan, a nun, and to Sir Sydney Cockerell, the curator of the Fitzwilliam Museum, in Cambridge, who arranged a meeting between her and Shaw, and from their letters in reply. According to the program, "the friendship spans the period 1924 through 1962," and the play ends with the death of the correspondents, one by one, before our eyes. The letters include Dame Laurentia's admiring note about "Saint Joan"—"A wonderful play, such simplicity!"—Shaw's account of a trip to the Holy Land, and Cockerell's description of a visit to Tolstoy. The friendship of Shaw and McLachlan is brought to a halt by her offense at his "Black Girl in Her Search for God" and his refusal to suppress it. When he reads what he thinks is a report of her death, he writes a heartfelt eulogy, only to find out that he has misread an announcement of her golden anniversary as a nun, and the letters resume. There is little in the way of action in the conventional sense: a gift of apples from Dame Laurentia to Sir Sydney (we watch him cut one up), and a trip to London for her under his auspices—that sort of thing. But the letters themselves and bits of essays and other writings are so gossipy and sparkling, and the reading of them—by Mr. Dotrice, Diana Douglas, and Michael Allinson, under William Partlan's direction—so animated and engaging, that the evening turns into a conversation of the highest order.

SHAW'S work is on view at the Criterion, in the Roundabout's "Candida," directed by Gloria Muzio. Unfortunately, the production barely nicks the surface, and I will not pick out (or on) the actors, except for a regretful wave to Ann Dowd, who is exactly right as Prossy. ♦

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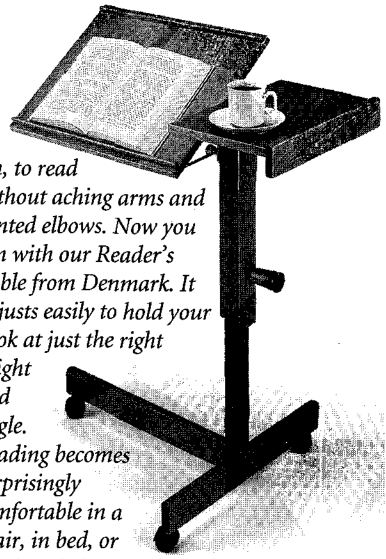

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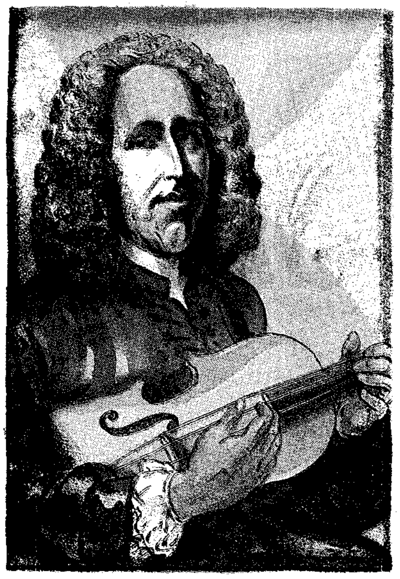
MUSICAL EVENTS

CHANGES OF HEART

BY PAUL GRIFFITHS

Debussy, writing about a 1903 concert performance of two acts from Rameau's "Castor et Pollux," mentioned among the marvels Pollux's air "Nature, amour," a piece "so unique in feeling and so novel in its construction that all sense of time and space is suspended." The composer, he went on, "seems like one of our contemporaries, whom we would congratulate as we left the theatre." Many of us at the Brooklyn Academy of Music recently might also have been looking around for the tall, gaunt figure of M. Rameau to shake by the hand, after performances of "Castor" and of "Les Indes Galantes" ("Third-World Civilities," one might say) conducted by William Christie, with his group Les Arts Florissants. Both works have been recorded for Harmonia Mundi by the same outfit, with almost the same casts ("Les Indes Galantes" on HMC 901367.69 and "Castor," a new release, on HMC 901435.37), and what I have to say applies as much to these recordings as to the live performances, since home listeners will miss only the excited atmosphere at BAM and the snazzy concert attire of the singers: Sandrine Piau's tightly buttoned vermillion silk dress, erupting into a bulbous bustle; a modish tuxedo sported by one of the gentlemen of the chorus.



Two operas by Jean-Philippe Rameau come to life in new performances by William Christie's Les Arts Florissants.

In style and daring and contemporaneity, the apparel matched the music better than wigs and farthingales could have done. Mr. Christie's ability to make old music sound new is well known here, thanks especially to his ensemble's performances of Lully's "Atys" at BAM last year and in 1989. Re-creating the distant art of the French Baroque is, in the Arts Florissants way, simply a matter of creating it perfectly, with the addition of particular perfections devised particularly for Rameau. Young, vibrato-free, well-tuned voices are crucial, but equally vital—and vitalizing to Rameau's line—is the ease with which both singers and instrumentalists include ornament as part of the phrase, so that the frequent mordents, trills, and appoggiaturas are moments of suppleness in the melody, and not encrustations.

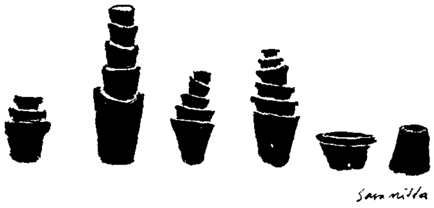
Then, there's Mr. Christie's way of wafting the music into the air. The tempting connection between Rameau and his coeval Watteau lies partly in the weightlessness of their figures, and Mr. Christie makes a fine show of Rameau's levitation by his sense for the exquisite, the momentary, in the harmony (Debussy on another occasion was to write of "harmonic 'moments' to caress the ear"), by the fluidity of his tempo, and by the give, too, in how he draws together his ensemble. As if drafting the musical line with a pencil, he can make it precise and fine, as he has to do when he lets some of the dances dash off at the boisterous speeds they demand, or else he can use the flat edge of the lead, brush the voices and instruments along a little more relaxedly. The resulting slight spread in the harmony may on occasion produce a succulent sensuousness, as in the entry of Cupid in the prologue to "Castor," imploring his mother, Venus, to bring Mars to heel; more generally, the gentle arpeggiation suggests music we catch as it's just moving into focus, music in formation, in the present.

We might also feel the music to be new, to be happening now, because Rameau, like Monteverdi, reaches us unstaled by a continuous history of performance: this is music that has only recently begun to come alive again. Other freshnesses, though, are inherent in what the music is, and in what these musicians reveal it to be. The performances are polished to complete transparency, letting through the vividness of the imagery, and its range, from monumental lament (the chorus with which the drama of "Castor" begins, done with a chilling slow tremolo on the long second syllable of "gémisse") to seductive suavity (Hebe's attendants courting Pollux in the second act, their music falling in sweet sixths through gruppetti as they sing of chains of flowers), or to the harsh, jagged music of the demons in the third act. But I suppose the first surprise of the Arts Florissants performance, even to one familiar with the old Harnoncourt recording of the opera, is in the expressive immediacy, the way the recitatives, especially, respond so swiftly to movements of thought and feeling.

"Castor" is full of recitative dialogues in which changes of heart are brought about. In the first act, Telaira, lamenting her beloved Castor, persuades Pollux to repress his own love for her and restore her lover to life. (This version of the story has it that, while both twins were Leda's children, only Pollux was the son of Jupiter.) In the third act, Telaira at Hell's gates presses Pollux to take the fateful step that will lead him down to Hades to change places with his brother, against the wishes of Phoebe, who is in pursuit of him. Pollux's discourse with the two women comes to rest on the high plateau of a marvellous trio of divergent emotions, where Mr. Christie leaves the voices to meander almost alone, supported by the barest touch of a cello on the bass line. The climax of the drama, in the fourth act, is a long scene between the brothers, in which Pollux's firmness and regret project a steady support for Castor's impressionable weave of feeling: joy at seeing his brother again, delight at the prospect of rejoining Telaira, horror that this means leaving Pollux once more and as his substitute, acceptance that only thereby can the twins—together in intention but eternally apart—best serve Telaira. Finally, in the fifth act comes another long dialogue, where Castor insists that he must go back again to the Elysian fields and release Pollux, while Telaira swerves from felicity to fury to a bleak acknowledgment of human impotence in her marvellous line "If they had loved, these gods, they would know what love means."

The situations are moving, but it's Rameau's music that makes all this the dearest matter on earth—partly because the affect can be so nimbly altered by a new insinuation of harmony or rhythmic character, partly because the voices are often in deliciously unstable territory between the formulas of recitative and the phrases of song. The quickness of expression can perhaps be illustrated best by an example from "Les Indes Galantes," since in that work a whole story has to be unfolded inside each act, and there isn't the leisure for argument. Phani, an Inca princess, is in love with Carlos, a Spanish officer, but is afraid of her people's retribution. In a single passage of recitative, lasting only half a minute, she invites Carlos with warm, falling intervals, which lead her into an increasingly hectic enthusiasm before she stops, to a cautionary reminder in the harmony, and warns him not to come alone; then a brisk modulation enables her to race off again in imagining what might happen if Carlos were indeed to attempt an unaided abduction, and the sequence ends with an almost squeaked "Ciel!"

There are problems of acceptance here, problems that the BAM surtitles didn't address, and wouldn't have addressed even if they had been free of solecisms. We need to be following, and feeling, Phani's mood shifts as they happen, not reading about them in a different time, and in a dismayingly informal translation. No wonder the audience laughed. And though laughter isn't inappropriate, it ought to come from sympathy with the work's self-conscious outlandishness—with the fun that Rameau has with emotional quick changes, including some in a couple of wildly improbable recognition scenes. Maybe Louis Fuzelier's libretto for "Les Indes Galantes" does creak at times, but a man who could write a line like "Lorsque l'on aime, on craint toujours" ("To be in love is always to be in fear") wasn't entirely useless as a poet of the emotions, and the swagger and the suddenness provided conditions in which Rameau's music could flourish.



"Castor et Pollux" differs from "Les Indes Galantes" as classical from exotic. It lacks such bizarreries as the volcanic eruption whereby Phani's problems are resolved (fierce reiterated discords for the earthquake, followed by violin rockets to simulate the burning stones that the chorus sees shooting through the air), and has a simple integrity of tone and subject. But the two works are close in Rameau's output: "Les Indes Galantes" was his second piece to be performed in the theatre, after "Hippolyte et Aricie," and "Castor" his third, coming two years later, in 1737. They're also formally similar, for though the earlier piece is classed as an opera-ballet and the later one as a lyric tragedy, "Castor" has hardly any less dancing, and "Les Indes Galantes" hardly any less display of emotion through song. Besides, these aren't really distinct categories: some of the dances are choral numbers, and some of the songs are dances with voice.

The dance element is one clear impediment to staging the works, but it's also part of what makes them structurally, as well as expressively, special and contemporary. In Rameau, opera has still not been released from its origins in festival, in telling a dramatic story for the purposes of celebration, and the dances repeatedly remind us that our contact with the myth is only through a theatre of artifice. But there are more levels than these two. The prologue of the gods, showing Venus's triumph over Mars, supplies not only a conventional nod to the recent ending of the War of the Polish Succession but also a frame for the entire drama; to that extent, it's well worth keeping. (Rameau removed it when Olympian allegories for the news went out of fashion, but Mr. Christie follows the original version.) Then, within the drama, two of the danced divertissements are entertainments that are provided for certain of the characters, and that we hear, such is Rameau's command of nuance, as if through those characters' ears: the luscious but vain enchantment Pollux descries in Hebe's air

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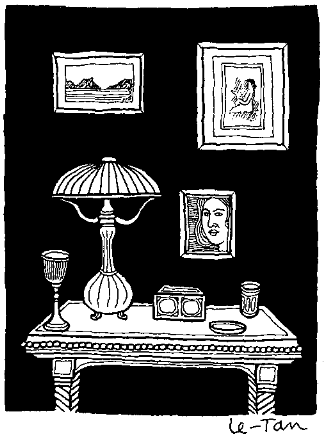
and sarabande; the monotonous, flaccid sound that eternal bliss has for Castor, alone in the Elysian fields.

In both these passages, and, indeed, in much of the opera, characters feel themselves to be in the wrong place: what motivates song in "Castor" is, beyond the much more usual conflicts between love and honorable conduct, a sense of alienation, a longing for somewhere else, for an abode where present frictions and frustrations would fall away. This again is something both Watteauesque and modern—modern because the resolution is to be found not within the story but in a leap from it onto another narrative level. Castor longs for the world when he is in Hades, and for Hades when he is back in the world. What settles both brothers, and stops their singing, is their final emplacement in the celestial realms of the frame, of the prologue, which is musically recalled when Jupiter arrives briefly in the second act, and recalled again at the start of the final astronomical masque, in which Castor and Pollux are installed as a sign of the zodiac—with enticing possibilities, surely, for any production team.



The question is not why Castor and Pollux should, through three and a half acts, be feeling themselves in need of relocation but, rather, why a story of displaced personages should have wrought from Rameau his finest opera. Perhaps "Pygmalion"—his finest one-act piece, which is also available in an exhilarating Arts Florissants recording (on HMC 901381)—may help us toward an answer, since the myth of the statue brought to life echoes something tremulous and wakening in Rameau's characters (something like the soft light that shines out of Watteau's). They are baroque statues being made, by the power of a new musical art, to speak, and what they speak of most is the fearfulness they find in the human emotions they newly feel—a fearfulness that motivates, most explicitly, the air for Pollux that impressed Debussy. They might well wish to become statues again, to become silent, which is what Castor and Pollux eventually achieve.

If this betokens some consciousness in Rameau's characters that they are characters, the self-knowledge might come from the composer's own extraordinary self-awareness in the act of creation. Like so many twentieth-century artists, but like few of earlier times, Rameau was a theorist, too, and a theorist before he was much of a composer. He knew what he was doing, and why he was doing it. Writing, for instance, of Telaira's heart-stopping lament "Tristes apprêts, pâles flambeaux" ("Piteous rites, faltering flares"), he pointed out the "compunction" produced by the drop from tonic to subdominant on the fourth syllable, and the relief brought by the restoration of the tonic on the eighth. Few composers before the age of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, one imagines, can have found their tunes in quite that way. Rameau's characters are born into a world lit by a theory of how their singing works on the passions; that is the world in which they look around, understand themselves, and flinch.

For bringing these intensely touching characters to plaintively reluctant life at BAM and on record, one has to shower praise on Howard Crook and Jérôme Corréas (the Dioscuri of high artistry combined with directness, and both prominently featured in the other recordings), on Mark Padmore (his bright tenor a trumpet to Mr. Crook's expressively virtuoso oboe), and on several diverse sopranos: Agnès Mellon for the purity and anxiety of Telaira, Claron McFadden for the welcoming voluptuousness of Hebe in "Les Indes Galantes," Sandrine Piau for several smart impersonations in both operas, and Véronique Gens for the arresting drama of Phoebe, who steps into "Castor" almost as a character from opera seria. More praise has to go to the darting violins, to the sensitive continuo team, to the bassoons of hornlike richness and warmth, and, of course, to Mr. Christie.

I end with Debussy's words, this time restated without quotation marks. Moments of real joy in life are rare: I wouldn't want to keep them to myself. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

MULTIPLE EXPOSURE

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

THE documentary "Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography," directed by Arnold Glassman, Todd McCarthy, and Stuart Samuels, is much more fun than its college-catalogue title suggests. The movie, which begins a week's run at New York's Film Forum on April 2nd, is refreshingly unacademic. It's cheery, convivial, and swift: for ninety minutes, stunning images, drawn from all eras of movie history, pass before us, and we listen to a couple of dozen veteran cinematographers speaking about what they do. With a few exceptions, the cinematographers are a likable, unpretentious bunch. Most of them seem happier talking shop—telling an anecdote about how they solved a specific visual problem in a specific film, or how they happened on an especially striking effect—than theorizing about the art of cinema. They present themselves as craftsmen; for the most part, the articulate pros we hear in "Visions of Light" aren't out to impress us with their uniqueness or to convince us of the aesthetic importance of their visual innovations. They're ideal commentators for a movie-history survey, because the perspective of craftsmen is inherently historical: they're always aware that they're part of a tradition—that their painstakingly acquired technical knowledge is the sum of their predecessors' small practical discoveries. They reserve their greatest admiration for the movies that have taught them the most (Laszlo Kovacs refers to "Citizen Kane" as "a textbook for us") and for those that have used the lessons of the past most imaginatively (John Bailey sees "The Conformist" as "a compendium of all of cinema language" up to its time). The cinematographers interviewed in "Visions of Light" make great teachers because they've never stopped being students.

Afterglow: A scene from "The Night of the Hunter," one of the films featured in "Visions of Light."

And the movie is a joy to look at. It's easy to share the commentators' delight in the achievements of their colleagues and masters, and when the parade of images is over you don't feel sated. The documentary tells its story chronologically, but the structure isn't rigid: it marches steadily toward the present day while allowing itself periodically to circle back or to make a detour onto an interesting-looking side road. It's a long distance from the simple, elegant black-and-white imagery of the silent era to the wide-screen color cinematography of today's films, which can pack the frame with enough visual information to tax even the most alert and experienced moviegoer's powers of concentration. The flashbacks—most of which are prompted by the interview subjects themselves—not only function as relief for eyes wearying of ever-increasing complexity but also have the effect of checking the triumphal-progression tendencies of textbook history and Hollywood filmmaking. Art

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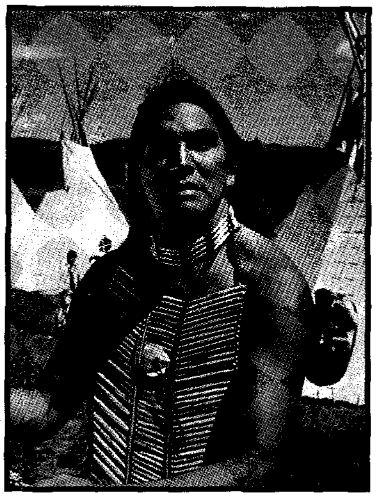

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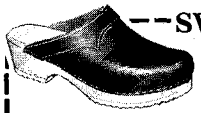

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forms do not necessarily proceed on an unbroken ascending line toward perfection. The current state of movies isn't much to celebrate, and "Visions of Light," despite its generally upbeat tone, can't really throw up its arms and go into a victory dance at the end. Instead, the movie keeps dropping in delicate, fleeting reminders of the medium's past glories, and they, along with the voices of the present-day craftsmen, are what the filmmakers use to persuade us that there may yet be hope.

Actually, disenchanted moviegoers (which, in practical terms, probably means everybody over the age of twelve) are the ideal audience for "Visions of Light." Watching even short excerpts from "Sunrise" or "Citizen Kane" or "Sweet Smell of Success" or "The Night of the Hunter" or "Chinatown" can revive senses that have been dulled by the crushing predictability of recent movies. They remind you why you were so excited by movies in the first place, and make you feel slightly less crazy for continuing to go. If you're a real, obsessed fan, the picture also provides the stimulus for lively argument about the choices it makes. The movie concentrates on American cinematographers (and foreign-born cinematographers who have worked extensively in American movies), and thus leaves out some of the profession's greatest and most influential talents: G. R. Aldo ("Umberto D," "Senso"), Kazuo Miyagawa ("Ugetsu," "Rashomon"), Christian Matras ("Grand Illusion," "The Earrings of Madame De . . ."), Eugene Shuftan ("Quai des Brumes," "Eyes Without a Face")—and that's the short list. And its treatment of contemporary cinematography suffers both from the inclusion of a long, nutty discourse by Vittorio Storaro on the color scheme of "The Last Emperor" and from the omission of any examples of the exquisite, restlessly inventive work of Philippe Rousselot ("Diva," "Thérèse," "Hope and Glory," "The Miracle").

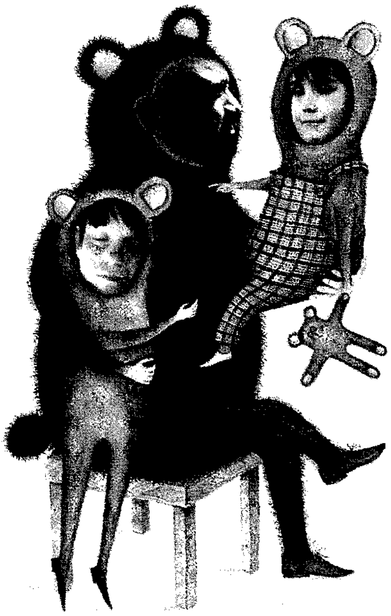
It seems incomprehensible, too, that the filmmakers could leave out Burnett Guffey, whose cinematography for "Bonnie and Clyde" had an enormous impact on the look of American movies, and Lucien Ballard, who crowned a long and varied career with the most brilliantly photographed Western in movie history, Peckinpah's "The Wild Bunch." Westerns are, in fact, the one serious blind spot of "Visions of Light." Short clips from "The Professionals" and "McCabe & Mrs. Miller" (neither of them a typical genre movie) and a single, unidentified shot from Ford's "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" are all that the movie gives us from a genre that has supplied the American cinema with some of its most awe-inspiring imagery. The filmmakers reinforce our suspicions about their personal biases by devoting an entire sequence to films shot in New York. That gritty urban look can be exhilarating, and the sequence is skillfully edited; still, a survey that finds room for a substantial clip from "The French Connection" but not a frame from "The Wild Bunch" or "My Darling Clementine" risks losing some credibility.

In a way, though, arguing with "Visions of Light" is part of the pleasure of watching it. These days, it's rare to see a picture that you feel like talking about after you've left the theatre. The film is obviously a labor of love, yet it's not so reverent that it shuts us out—forces us merely to gaze at it passively, wonderingly. Glassman, McCarthy, and Samuels seem to know, as their subjects do, that movies are supposed to stir us up, get our minds and senses and emotions working at full capacity. Education—in a craft or an art, or anything else—aims for the same effect; when the teaching is done in the right spirit, learning can have the kick of a terrific action movie. "Visions of Light" never feels like a lecture. It's looser, more democratic; it's like a lively department party, in which the faculty and students mix freely and everyone has had a couple of drinks and all you can hear is the bracing hum of a dozen passionate discussions. "Visions of Light" is filled with the sights and sounds of people figuring things out together. That may or may not have anything to do with art, but, at least, it gives us a beautiful and rare kind of entertainment.

MEANWHILE, back at the multiplex, the sounds of grumbling and snoring prevail. At showings of Marshall Herskovitz's "Jack the Bear," most of the grumbling will probably come from those who have read the smart, tough-minded 1974 novel, by Dan McCall, on which the movie is nominally based; the snoring will be provided by everyone else. The hero and narrator is a twelve-year-old nicknamed Jack the Bear (Robert J. Steinmiller, Jr.)—a reference, the book tells us, to the great 1940 Duke Ellington record. The movie leaves us in the dark about the nickname; nobody even plays the record (which might have brightened the audience's mood for three minutes or so). The name now suggests a cuddly toy, and that's exactly what Herskovitz and the screenwriter, Steven Zaillian, have turned Jack into.

The book's Jack is an unusually believable kid. His mother has died in a car accident, and he lives in a run-down Oakland neighborhood with his father (played in the movie by Danny DeVito) and a three-year-old brother named Dylan (Miko Hughes); Dad, an aging hipster who supports the family by acting as host for a late-night monster-movie show on local TV, is affectionate but unreliable, and Jack the Bear is left to his own emotional devices rather more than he'd care to be. The novel never asks us to feel sorry for its confused, making-it-up-as-he-goes-along hero; Jack is randy, foul-mouthed, and occasionally cruel, and when he's feeling particularly stressed out he rips off some of his father's booze or pot and gets himself wasted. Herskovitz and Zaillian, obviously terrified that the audience might lose sympathy for a hero who doesn't always talk or act like a model child, systematically eliminate anything ambiguous or disturbing in the character. They've washed his mouth out with soap, reduced his furious, enthusiastic erotic gropings to a couple of chaste kisses, and cleared the air completely of the marijuana haze that pervades the household in the novel. (Even Dad doesn't touch the stuff anymore.) This Jack is a Teddy bear, and one that has been soaked in a warm bath of virtue and sentimentality: he comes out spotless, soft, and fuzzy.

The movie itself winds up looking faded and characterless. That's what happens when filmmakers don't trust either the material or the audience. Herskovitz tries to seduce us with a serious, literary tone, but most viewers will see through the manner pretty quickly, because the picture has nothing interesting to say. And Zaillian—who demonstrated in his screenplay for "Awakenings" (1990) that he can drain the life out of the most compelling literary material—has recast the story as a laughter-and-tears button-pusher. All the domestic turmoil builds up to a big, sloppy hug, to let us know that everything has been for the best: Jack, his father, and his brother are going to be a real family from now on. We'd feel a lot better, though, if the filmmakers had retained McCall's bleaker ending, in which young Jack takes stock of his chaotic family life and decides, "Too much shit for me." The audience doesn't much care whether these people are a real family or not, for the very good reason that "Jack the Bear" isn't a real movie. Herskovitz and Zaillian transform what might have been a great movie character—perhaps an American counterpart of Antoine Doinel, the sensitive delinquent of Truffaut's "The 400 Blows"—into a scrubbed sitcom cutie: Beaver Cleaver with a hint of attitude. The snoozers in the audience have the right idea; movies like this make you feel as if you'd been planted in the old recliner since about 1962. ♦



Fuzzy-wuzzy: Robert J. Steinmiller, Jr., Danny DeVito, and Miko Hughes in "Jack the Bear."

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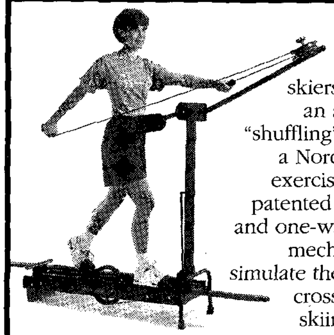

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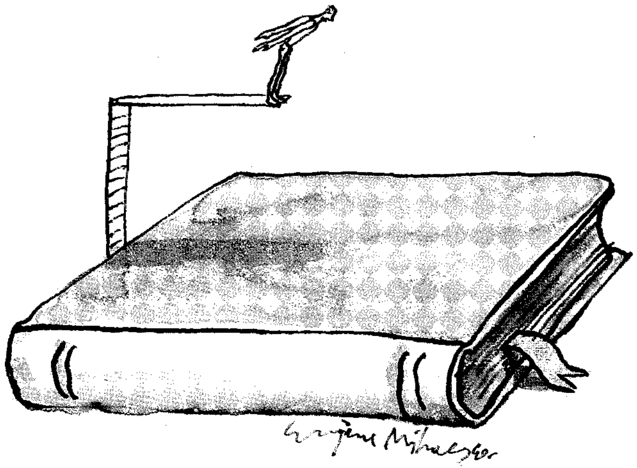
BOOKS

SWIMMING LESSONS

BY RICHARD JENKYNS



Like the flash of a fish glimpsed momentarily in running water, Charles Sprawson's own life flickers throughout "Haunts of the Black Masseur" (Pantheon; $23). The book is about swimming—in ancient Rome, in Japan, Germany, and America, but, above all, in England, to which four of the eight chapters are devoted—and, as various and unceasing as a river, it is profuse in curious facts. Practicing the breaststroke as he walks along a London street, Coleridge is stopped on the suspicion of picking pockets. Life imitates the surrealism of dreams as Bertrand Russell emerges naked from a dip in a lonely Oxfordshire river to find himself face to face (if that is the right phrase) with the Prime Minister. The Australian swimmer Annette Kellermann's body is pronounced by a Harvard professor to be physically the most nearly perfect of those of "ten thousand women scientifically tested"; seldom has a Harvard research program demanded such exacting field work. Alick Wickham, a Solomon Islander, breaks the world high-diving record by being duped: he accepted a hundred pounds to dive from a platform a hundred feet high into the Yarra River, in Australia, not realizing that the platform itself stood on a cliff as high again. Since he spent a week in a coma afterward, this is one world record that may never be broken.

For all the cascade of comic, eccentric, sometimes touching detail, it is the submarine presence of Sprawson's own personality which creates the book's strangely mesmeric quality. On the surface, "Haunts of the Black Masseur," which is fluidly and elegantly written, is a descriptive work, with little overt comment, but underneath, we feel, it is the product of an obsession. In homage to Lord Byron, Sprawson swims the Hellespont with his daughter, watching a Russian tanker glide past and thinking of the British warships, sunk in the Gallipoli campaign, lying in the depths below him. When he lands, his daughter is given a medallion on a ribbon; he gets nothing, because he is neither blond nor young. Still following in Byron's wake, he tries to swim across the Tagus at Lisbon but is hauled out of the oily waters by suspicious Coast Guards. He drives for sixteen hours across the desert for an evening dip in a pool in Phoenix designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. He floats in the midnight waters of Florida, watching the silhouettes of dancers jerking to the rhythms of "Louie, Louie," while the sounds of singers practicing carols for Christmas waft from the distance. He tries to swim everywhere that Tennessee Williams swam—in Santa Monica, in Barcelona, in the green slime of his pool at Key West, and in the marble halls of the New Orleans Athletic Club, where he surrenders himself to the manipulations of the Black Masseur. (This figure is left enigmatic and unexplained; his appearance in the title seems to be mere mystification—not the only such touch in the book.)

Sprawson tells us that he is writing one chapter by the Aegean Sea; a little later, inconsequentially, he mentions something that he has just read in the morning paper. And yet—and here is half the fascination—this is by no means a confessional book: the author remains elusive even when he seems to be confiding. His survey of ancient Rome takes him to the baths of Diocletian, converted into a church by Michelangelo. "Distracted recently by the sight of these startling columns and that of a gypsy's naked breast feeding a pendant infant, I lost through her liquid fingers all the money in my possession." How, exactly? But the architectural lecture has resumed, and we shall have to go without an explanation. A page later, Sprawson suggests that the nearest equivalent of the steamy atmosphere of the Roman baths these days, "now that the New York bath-houses have gone, are those basements in certain Hamburg hotels, where on velvet sofas by the side of green marble pools naked sirens offer up their charms among potted palms and papier mâché pillars." "Those basements"—it is not (surely) that we are meant to nod sagely, drawing on our own experience of the German demimonde. Rather, we are like passengers catching fragments of conversation on the other side of the train, tantalized but pretending not to listen.

The man himself may be elusive, but his feelings about swimming are distinctive. Since childhood, he tells us, he has seen the swimmer as introverted and self-absorbed, removed from everyday life. The absorption should be total: he prefers Shelley, whose death by drowning he presents as a kind of *Liebestod*, the culmination of a love affair with the sea, to Byron, whose talent was for the surface of things, in the water and in life. Sprawson's favorite swimmers are romantics, even when they are professionals. He despises the East European sportsmen, using up their youth doing innumerable lengths in sunless pools, but warms to the Australian champion Murray Rose, who tells him that to succeed the swimmer needs a water diviner's feel for his element and a sensuous involvement in even the sound of the currents passing across his moving body. Sprawson claims that professionals shave their bodies not just to eliminate air bubbles but, more important, for the thrill of a closer intimacy with the water. "Shaving has become a complex science," he says, the art being to keep up the thrill by not shaving too often. But he makes it sound less like a science than like a cult: the observance of ritual and the pursuit of ecstasy.

Curiously, though, he never refers to the most famous, and most often depicted, bath in history—the baptism of Christ. Baptism, in fact, is mentioned only once or twice, when Sprawson is reporting the way in which other people have described their feelings about bathing. This is indeed a pagan book, in more than one sense. It is pagan partly in its indifference to what the Christian tradition has characteristically contributed to its theme. Was there ever a more enchanting poem about swimming, for instance, than Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Epithalamion"? The "downdolphinry and bellbright bodies" of boys bathing in a river running through a wooded valley, and a passing stranger, shaken out of his listlessness by the sight, stripping off his clothes to laugh and swim, "froliclavish," in the "flinty kindcold element" of a pool nearby: all is natural and vivid. But then Hopkins amazes us. The valley, he declares, is a symbol of wedlock, the water of married love. This is an extraordinary collision of innocence and sensuousness, metaphor and actuality, yet all that Sprawson can see in it is the dim voyeurism of late-Victorian pederasty. "This was the age of the voyeur," he writes, "of observers who adopted the role of lonely witness rather than joyous participant in the Byronic manner." But Hopkins' stranger does fling himself into the water, and to compare his exuberance to the furtive hankerings of John Addington Symonds or the poetaster Ralph Chubb is sadly reductive.

"Haunts of the Black Masseur" is also pagan in a more positive sense. Sprawson quotes a number of swimmers who use a diffusedly religious language to recall the sensuousness of the experience of water. If some of this language has still a Christian coloring, it seems to be by way of metaphor: the veneration is directed not to a transcendent reality beyond nature but, in pagan spirit, to the physical experience itself. One swimmer speaks of "a spirit of worshipful thanksgiving" and a stillness like a benediction, another of "the ecstasy of the pilgrim who has come to the end of his hardships," a third of a "glory and a grace" found in surrendering his body to the sacred rivers of southern India. Even the pools of Southern California seem to Sprawson to be "quasi-inviolate shrines," like the pools that shimmer beside the mosques of Asia; he remarks that he has never, when flying in to Los Angeles, seen anyone in them. (Like a good many Englishmen, he sees America as the apo-

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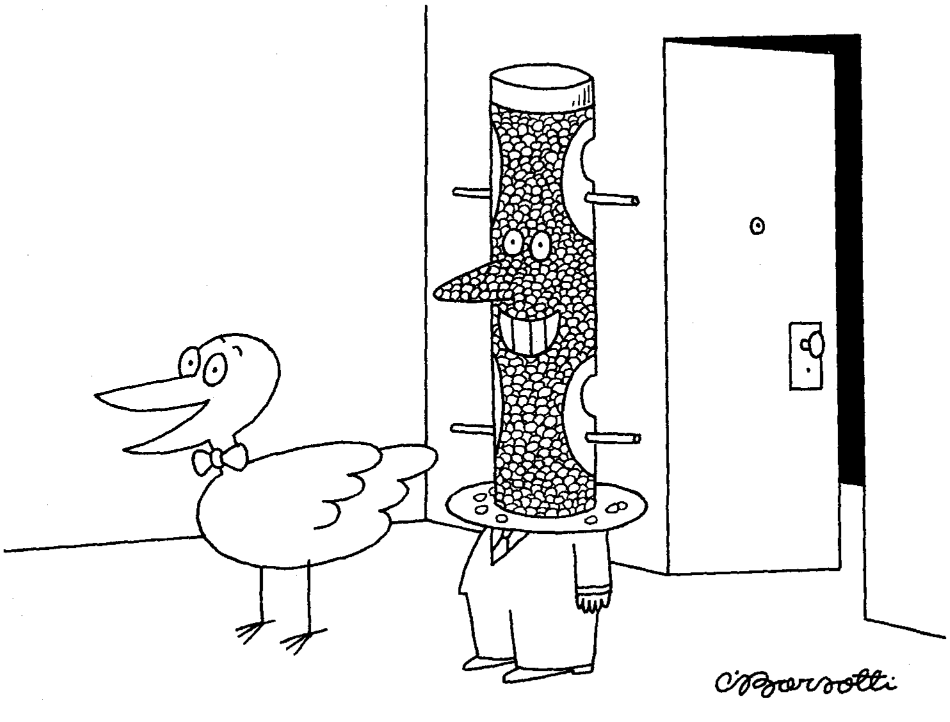
theosis of heroic materialism, to be viewed through glamorized but agreeably reprehending eyes.) He himself is obliged when passing near waters famous from classical antiquity—Lake Trasimene, the Bay of Salamis, the rivers Alpheus and Eurotas—to "swim and submerge in their waters, as some form of tribute to the local deity." He argues that the "classical impulse" was the "most characteristic aspect of romantic English swimming" in Shelley, in Swinburne, and on into the twentieth century. Cyril Connolly mixed pagan and Christian imagery as he remembered the bathing expeditions of his Eton school days, his head full of Plato and the Greek Anthology and the hope of finding a boy to fall in love with: "a fusion of my old trinity, grace, greenness, security, and therefore derived from Eden worship . . . a perfect blend of warm Hellenic paganism, recollected boyhood, and original sinlessness."

Sin or sinlessness? Is the pleasure of swimming pure or is it sensual? For several of Sprawson's favorite witnesses, it seems to be both. Sweaty and edgy in Berlin, Rupert Brooke longs for the pool at Grantchester, where "the shadowed waters fresh / Lean up to embrace the naked flesh," but a couple of years later he will abandon the sexual metaphor and compare the youth of England, preparing for war, to "swimmers into cleanness leaping." For Paul Valéry swimming is "*fornication avec l'onde*," and yet he also calls it the purest of all pastimes: "It seems to me that I discover and recognize myself when I return to this universal element. . . . To plunge into water, to move one's whole body, from head to toe, in its wild and graceful beauty; to twist about in its pure depths, this is for me a delight only comparable to love." Here again, purity and sex are intertwined, but there is also a third ingredient: the idea of a return to a universal element suggests less an adult sexuality than a regression to an earlier state. "Only comparable to love"—we are left wondering whether swimming is close to love or whether, as with many similes, the comparison draws its force from finding an unexpected point of contact between things essentially unlike. Walt Whitman is seduced by his "lover" the sea: "Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse, / Dash me with amorous wet." But this sea, too, rocking the swimmer into slumberousness, seems more mother than lover.

Surely, we start to think, the shadow of Dr. Freud is falling across our path. Though Sprawson makes little of the matter, he assumes it to be true that the pleasure of immersion represents an unconscious desire to return to the safe irresponsibility of the amniotic waters. Yet it seems clear that the memories of babyhood, however exciting or traumatic, are wiped out of the adult mind entirely. The most Freudian passage in Sprawson's book is drawn from Akira Kurosawa's autobiography. Kurosawa climbs to the head of a waterfall that seems to emerge from a rocky tunnel, and enters the darkness of the cavity, while the waters roar and swirl about him. Another time, he swims into a whirlpool, and, after a few moments of pain and terror which seem like hours, he floats up to the surface again, feeling a miraculous sense of rebirth. Sprawson attributes all this to the spirit of the samurai and the mythic realms of ancient significance to the Japanese. That seems too trusting: what we meet here is artifice, not instinct—a literary and all too self-conscious borrowing of the sacred and secular myths of the West.



"Hey, everybody, look who's here!"

LIKE Proust, Sprawson is in search of lost time. He begins the book with his memories of swimming as a boy in India, in the flooded subterranean vaults of a prince's palace, where the columns disappeared into black water. For him, the past is literally a foreign country. But almost any childhood can be remembered as a far and irrecoverable land. Sprawson likes those American stories which link swimming to boyhood and the lost Arcadia of the South: the hoodlum in Huston's film "The Asphalt Jungle" who dreams of returning to Kentucky and washing the city dirt off in a creek; the narrator of Robert Penn Warren's "All the King's Men" crystallizing the vanished innocence of the girl he loves in the memory of her swallow-diving through the sunlight; the hero of Fitzgerald's short story "The Swimmers" coming home to Virginia from his work in France and washing his mind clean of his miseries as he floats in the sea, remembering the playmates of his youth. A sense of shattered idyll is recurrent in Sprawson's book: the river where Shelley swam stained green by the waste of a papermaking plant; wire fencing round the Bandusian spring; sewage in the sacred waters of Gafsa. By the spring where King Numa consulted the nymph Egeria, the Egeria soda factory stands; and a dam has reduced to silt and weeds the dark pool near Cambridge, "smelling of mint and mud," where Rupert Brooke and Virginia Woolf bathed naked at night.

Sprawson has another childhood

memory. He tells us that his father moved from India to Benghazi, in North Africa, near the old Greek city of Cyrene. Swimming where Cleopatra is said to have swum, Sprawson could see traces of the ancient city beneath him: outlines of streets and colonnades emerging from the corrugated sand, among broken pillars and fragments of sculpture. It's a poetic fantasy become reality: one might think of Shelley's vision of Athens, trembling eternally within the surface of time's wrinkled river. In Sprawson's classical version of the *cathédrale engloutie*, nature and culture, an individual's past and the past of a civilization, come together. He's enchanted by the pervasive presence of fresh water in the classical world: his chapter on the Romans cannot keep itself to the subject of swimming but, like the fountains of Rome themselves, spills over into other themes—colored marble and fishponds and the chatter of running water that sounds through Latin poetry and Roman life. Latin poetry also provides him with a couple of slithery myths. Water is female in the story of Hermaphroditus, originally a male, who bathes in the waters of the nymph Salmacis and is transformed into a hermaphrodite as their two beings slide together. Water is male when Arethusa steps into the Alpheus, who is both river and river god, and is merged into his waters.

Here Sprawson's classical enthusiasm meets another of his themes: the quasi-religious idea that the swimmer finds himself by losing himself, that in the water the boundaries between man and nature are dissolved. The diarist W. N. P. Barbellion, slowly dying of disease, slips into a sea pool and feels himself immortal, "sunk deep in the bosom of old Mother Earth, who can not die." John Cowper Powys makes swimming into a "religious rite," a struggle toward "the non-human condition of floatingness and flowingness." Sprawson even toys with the notion of a regression to a past vastly more ancient than that of Greece and Rome. The swimmers in the paintings and photographs of interwar Germany, he suggests, seem to seek a world of primeval and universal harmony as they enter the waters from which all life evolved, and the figures in Munch's "Bathing Boys" mutate into amphibian forms that recall man's prehuman origins. Walter Pater, on being asked what he would like to be if he were not a man, answered, "A carp swimming for ever in the green waters of some royal château." (How apt that this great aesthete, even when metamorphosed into a fish, should preserve his sense of social distinction.) Sometimes the boundaries within nature itself begin to lose their clarity: Leni Riefenstahl photographs the high-divers at the Berlin Olympics from below, so that they seem to fly, or to swim in a cloudy heaven; Hopkins' young divers hurl themselves through "earthworld, airworld, waterworld"; Powys feels as if he were resolved into air and sky and sea.

Sprawson's book is subtitled "The Swimmer as Hero," but this is a misnomer: essentially, it is about the swimmer as votary. It draws its strength from the sense of hidden currents beneath the surface: outwardly, it is a stream of fact, anecdote, and quotation, without much open interpretation, and yet through accumulation it becomes the expression of an individual and rather unusual sensibility. It is hard to pin this down; to read Sprawson is to have the sense of a voice distinctive in timbre but coming from an unknown place. The man behind it seems a paradox—secret even when offering his personal experience, clothing his celebration of nature and instinct in the garb of a refined literary culture, observing his fanaticism with a certain coolness and detachment. There is something enticing in this; occasionally, he loses his direction (the chapter on Japan is weak), but mostly he succeeds in immersing the reader in his own world of aqueous obsession, persuading us that swimming does indeed have some obscure and ancient pull upon our inner sense. It is tempting to fancy that there is something in Freud's idea of womb memory after all, recognizing that he had the gift for mythmaking and that the power of myths comes not from truth but from providing an imaginative satisfaction. If you bathe in the Dead Sea or the Great Salt Lake, you cannot properly swim at all, because of the buoyancy of the briny water, and you cannot lie flat on the surface, either. But if you curve your back a little and tuck your knees up toward your chin you can rest comfortably in the warmish, soupy water for as long as you choose. And you may find that you are saying to yourself, "I like it here. I'm not sure I want to leave." ♦

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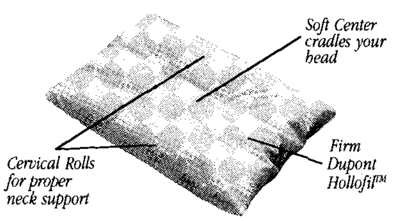
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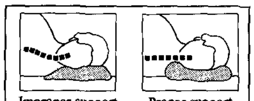
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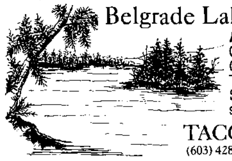

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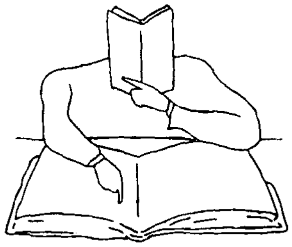
TO KNOW IS TO FOOL AROUND

BY VERLYN KLINKENBORG

NOT long ago, at Harvard University, I heard a lecturer, an intellectually fashionable young woman, try to deflect a question about a joke she had quoted by saying, "It's only a joke," whereupon her questioner, a much graver and intellectually more fashionable woman, wearing red leather, said, "But, as we know, even jokes signify." What sounded like a zephyr of assent blew through the crowd, as if to acknowledge the transparency of the lecturer's self-defense, but it was really the air going out of the proceedings, and it reminded me why academic life is the perfect setting for the novel of manners. It's an axiom of the genre that its characters can't plead unintentionality, for among the behaviorally overdetermined—who are the natural inhabitants of the novel of manners—everything signifies. And nowhere, these days, does everything signify the way it does in academic life, where the tyranny of the oversignifying signifier and its political coefficient is nearly complete.



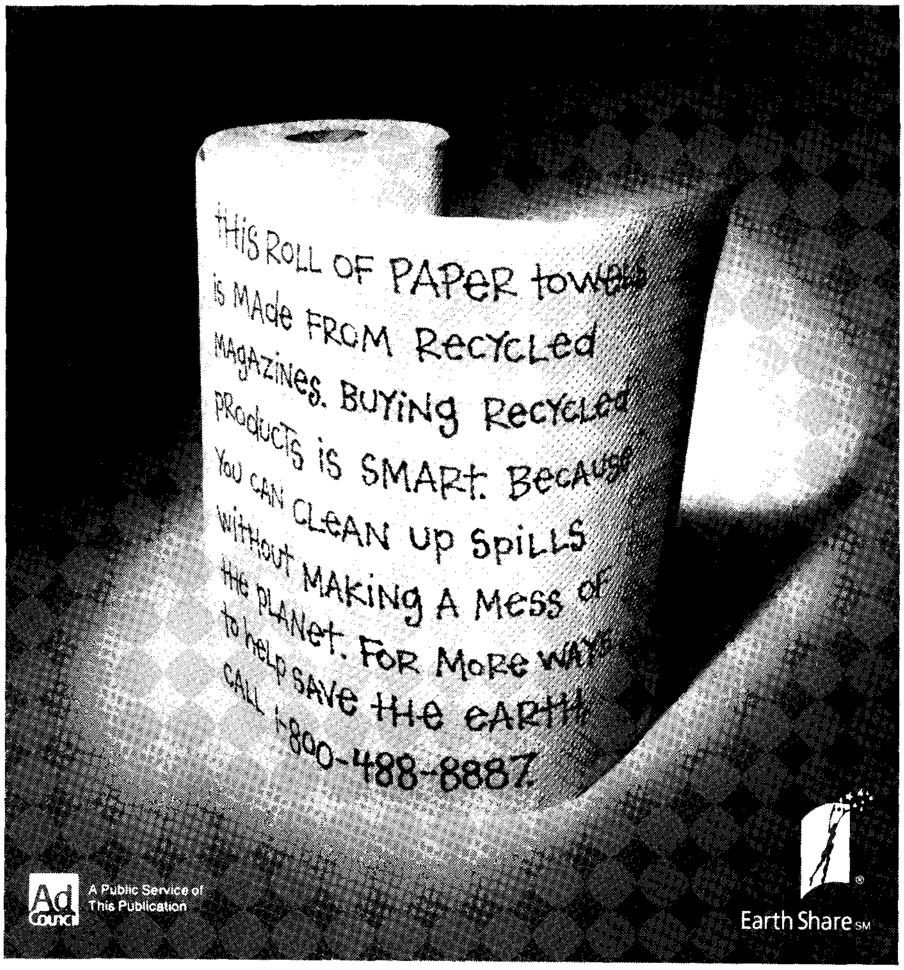
Margaret Nathan is the heroine of "Rameau's Niece" (Ticknor & Fields; $19.95), Cathleen Schine's amusing new novel of manners. Margaret is an intellectual, and she has written the biography of an eighteenth-century woman named Charlotte de Montigny, who rechristened the parts of the human body in a little-known tract called "Anatomie sans Culotte." (She calls the testicles, for instance, the *cur nons*—the "why nots"—after a motto that Benjamin Franklin engraved on Lafayette's sword.) To Margaret's surprise, her book, "The Anatomy of Madame de Montigny," has become one of the books everybody buys and nobody reads, but to which *Diacritics* devotes a special issue nonetheless. Margaret's husband, Edward Ehrenwerth, who is British and is a Whitman scholar, teaches in the Comp. Lit. Department at Columbia. (Margaret holds no university appointment.) Edward has the ingratiating, if slightly maddening, egotism you sometimes find in too-adored professors—an egotism expressed as a "generous, almost profligate recognition *of everything*, like sunlight, illuminating whatever it touched, and touching whatever it could." He is cheerful, witty, rigorous, and faithful. "If 'willful' and 'blessed' were synonyms," Margaret thinks, "they would describe Edward and the gentle, unvarying rhythm of his days." Margaret and Edward have no children—or, rather, they are their own children.

Margaret is as bright as anyone in her world, including Edward, but she has the kind of intelligence that lives in her prose and not on her lips. That is why, despite the éclat of her biography, which was "hailed by every publication from *Savvy* to *Dyke: A Quarterly* as a feminist breakthrough," she is considered "a mute, and so a fool" by people who come across her at dinner parties, rather than in the pages of her book. It so happens that Margaret also has a bad memory. She is surrounded by men and women who possess their lives as artifacts, whose tenacious memories seem almost aggressive to her. As teachers and writers, they take part in an unceasing forum, which Margaret joins only intermittently. For her, ideas don't really belong to some public exchange. They are privately held and privately scrutinized, and her own serve mainly as indices of her shifting passions. She experiences them "the way other people experienced landscapes": she "drove through them admiringly and wrote scholarly articles about the view, snapshots that became more real for her than the memory of the original." About Edward, "sweating and loquacious," and their friend Lily, a "pretentious sexpot fraud," there is a kind of intellectual profligacy that Margaret, who isn't loquacious, pretentious, or a sexpot, but who worries about fraudulence, can only envy. She wonders "what it would be like to sit next to herself at a dinner party" and concludes, "She would have nothing to say. And neither would she."

Being forgetful in Margaret's intellectual milieu is like being badly bred in the social circle of Emma Woodhouse: both sins are venial ones, but venial only if the sinner is thereby relegated to an inferior station in life. Margaret's frequent lapses—"Ron Perelman and Richard Perle; she knew she disapproved of them both, but which one for which reason?"—remind you how old-fashioned the figure of the absent-minded professor really is, how much it belongs to an era of academic innocence, when forgetfulness was allowed to be unmotivated. But now the world is full of "linguistic traps," which are really political traps, and Margaret, whom you quickly come to like very much, is their natural victim. Before long, her forgetfulness begins to feel to the reader like a kind of intellectual freedom, a liberation from significance. It isn't just an absence; it's a means of focussing.

What drives the plot of "Rameau's Niece" is that, after six years of marriage, Margaret forgets why she loves Edward. Or, to put it more precisely, the statement "I love Edward" appears to her one day as an untested hypothesis instead of a truth. This is largely the fault of a manuscript that Margaret is translating, a work called "Rameau's Niece," whose title, of course, is a play on "Rameau's Nephew," Diderot's famous book. "Rameau's Niece" is a dialogue between a philosopher—a friend of Rameau's and the author of a "Treatise on Sense and Sociability"—and a beautiful young woman, who is the niece in question. The manuscript contains fragments of "Helvétius, Diderot, Kant, Condorcet—everyone who was anyone in the eighteenth century—as well as considerable portions of John Locke's 'Essay Concerning Human Understanding.' " It sounds like a conventional eighteenth-century philosophical text, conducted with the elaborate politesse of the period. But out of the frame, behind the screen of elegant abstract diction, something else is going on. "Rameau's Niece" is really a piece of rationalist erotica:

> MYSELF: Now your education can begin. First, your senses will awaken. You will see



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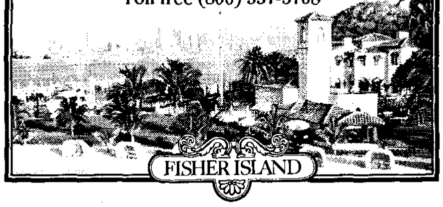

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and hear and smell, you will taste and you will touch.

And then, ah! As your senses awaken, all the inlets to the mind are set open; now, now, all the objects of nature will rush thither.

SHE: Thither?

MYSELF: Thither.

SHE: To the inlets?

What disturbs Margaret is not the tacit eroticism of "Rameau's Niece," but that the philosopher and his student decide to test empirically (in the sack) a number of philosophical propositions, the most cogent of which is "To judge is to feel." It occurs to Margaret that she can't be sure she loves her husband, because she has never tested her love by venturing romantically outside the boundaries of her marriage. Suddenly, her inlets awaken. "Adultery, Margaret thought, is an epistemological necessity. Rameau's niece found that out. To know is to fool around." Margaret lifts her head from her books—Bacon one day, Hobbes the next—to discover an erotic landscape spreading toward the horizon. In Prague, she delivers a lecture on underground Enlightenment literature. Her thesis: "The desire to know is desire." But when, after getting lost among the gargantuan buttocks and breasts of Prague's civic statuary, Margaret returns to her hotel and her bath, she is surprised by what it is she desires to know. "You are in Prague," she thinks. "You are alone. Your search for knowledge has led you here, to this bath, to this revelation: alone, you see a perfectly respectable city as a throbbing, eroticized house o' weenies." That is the first of her revelations. The second, which is prompted by a handsome French-speaking stranger seated next to her on the plane home, is this: "her true self, she now knew, was a sexually hysterical, xenophobic, middle-aged midwesterner from the 1930s."

Among Edward's friends is a French couple who declare, over drinks, that "The project of the Enlightenment is dead!" And yet that project, so defiantly extinguished in fashionable academe and so defiantly undead everywhere else, is construed variously by the characters in this novel. It is judgment: "Judgment is tyranny," says Lily. It is the desire to know: "Reason fueled by Romanticism. Or vice versa," according to Margaret. It is a kind of deep pragmatism: "To find the meaning, understand the use." But the true Enlightenment project, especially for those who, like Margaret, have poor memories, is empiricism, which is a theory that can embrace both intellect and sensation. "A person deprived of a good memory feels but cannot judge," Margaret tells Lily. And so under the influence of "Rameau's Niece," a piece of late-eighteenth-century didactic pornography, Margaret adopts empiricism as her philosophical mode. She leaves her husband and wanders among her erotic fantasies like Samuel Johnson among the philosophers' stones, kicking them to see whether or not her foot rebounds, misreading everything but her desire, which is to know certainty in affairs of the heart. In this sly parable of a novel, Margaret hearkens to Kant, when she really should be listening to Motown.

About "Rameau's Niece"—the novel as well as the manuscript—you might be tempted to say, "It's only a joke," if an especially witty one. But, as we know, even jokes signify. There is getting to be a long tradition of academic parody in contemporary fiction—from "Pale Fire" to "Mating," from Kingsley Amis to Don DeLillo—and it seems to make no difference, as far as the quality of the joke is concerned, what theoretical fashion prevails on campus. With their pants down, deconstructionists are just as funny as doddering old classicists. The obliquity of the intellect is always amusing, if only as a pretext for slapstick. "It is the human condition to theorize and criticize theory," a Czech philosopher tells Margaret. "It is our mechanism of adaptation to the world." But, the philosopher admits, as a mechanism of adaptation theoretical acumen is a little like the giraffe's neck: it's one method of reaching the acacia leaves, but it looks perfectly natural only to giraffes. "Rameau's Niece" is that rare comic novel—a warm comic novel—about the temporary dishabituation of an intellectual: a story about a giraffe who wakes one day to find her long neck simply extraordinary and wonders how it got that way and what good it is. ♦

BOOKS BRIEFLY NOTED

FICTION

Woman of the Inner Sea

by Thomas Keneally

(Doubleday; $21)

THOMAS KENEALLY'S previous book took place in the claustrophobic atmosphere of a hijacked airplane; his new one unfolds across the wide-open spaces of his native Australia. Kate Gaffney-Kozinski is an absorbed and adoring mother of two, and the somewhat uninterested wife of a Sydney construction mogul. Then she is wrenched from motherhood by an unspeakable accident, the details of which are only gradually and tantalizingly revealed. Agonized and estranged, Kate disappears into Australia's interior, looking for an eternal present in which to lose herself; she ends up serving beer and steaks in a town deep in the outback, where the locals rely on the Biblical floods that regularly besiege the town to provide their lives with definition and importance. Kate has thoughtlessly neglected to disengage herself from the Kozinski family's considerable fortune, so her husband sends an enforcer from his construction business to track her down. Keneally explores the myths and symbols that his characters live by—a grim Polish joke popular with the Kozinskis, the Catholic vestments used in the Mass for Kate's dead children, the Australian coat of arms. He acknowledges their power and then adroitly turns them into something slightly different, confounding the reader's expectations. In his latest novel—two parts spiritual odyssey, one part fable, one part adventure—this complicated exercise is exhilarating.

GENERAL

Systems of Survival

by Jane Jacobs

(Random House; $22)

THIS intellectually nourishing venture supposes a five-person symposium convoked by a retired publisher to investigate what seems to him a breakdown in ethics in modern times. Over many meetings, the group distinguishes two conflicting ethical systems, designed for different kinds of society or for differing activities in society. One morality suits manufacturing, trade, and finance; the other is appropriate to war, defense, police, and public administration. In working out the implications of different ways of being virtuous, the group realizes that, just as Plato's Republic maintains, serious difficulties ensue when the rules proper to one system are applied to activities belonging to the other system: it's O.K. to peddle widgets, wrong to peddle influence. The symposium participants draw examples not only from philosophy but from anthropology, ecology, history, literature, sociology, and many other disciplines, and the eclectic sources add gaiety as well as information and persuasiveness. Though Jacobs' characters are not as memorable as Plato's, her language is unassuming, clear, and brisk.

The City in Slang: New York Life and Popular Speech

by Irving Lewis Allen

(Oxford; $25)

A NOVEL way of writing social history is explored in this book, which traces the story of New York City from the early nineteenth century to the present in terms of its popular speech—catchwords, street talk, slang. The author, a professor of sociology who doesn't write like a sociologist, shows how the sharply diverse neighborhoods of the city contributed to the hundreds of carefully shaded expressions for social differences, and how the barrooms, boarding houses, and brothels, the "oyster houses" and "lobster palaces," and the dance halls and sports arenas all had their own lingo, much of it picked up and given melodic currency by Tin Pan Alley. Allen goes into the etymologies of words and phrases that originated in New York, like "hot dog," "stage-door Johnny" and "Champagne Charlie," "rubbernecker," "dumb Dora," and "gold-digger." He also mines the rich lode of pejorative expressions that New Yorkers have invented for people from the provinces. A lively piece of popular scholarship, illustrated with prints and drawings. ♦

JOHN HERSEY

JOHN HERSEY, who died on March 24th, at the age of seventy-eight, had a distinguished career as a novelist and another as a teacher, but he was above all a reporter. "Hiroshima," his account of the experiences of six people who lived through the world's first atomic attack, may be the most famous magazine article ever published. It was the first and last article ever to occupy all the editorial space of an entire issue of *The New Yorker*—that of August 31, 1946—and after it appeared as a book it sold some three and a half million copies, in many editions, and is still in print. Perhaps more astonishingly, its success was deserved. If ever there was a subject calculated to make a writer overwrought and a piece overwritten it was the bombing of Hiroshima; yet Hersey's reporting was so meticulous, his sentences and paragraphs were so clear, calm, and restrained, that the horror of the story he had to tell came through all the more chillingly.

"Hiroshima" was not Hersey's first article for *The New Yorker;* that distinction belonged to a Reporter at Large piece called "Survival," published June 17, 1944, which was a narrative of the heroism of the young skipper of the PT 109, Lieutenant (j.g.) John F. Kennedy. Nor was it his last: some two dozen of his nonfiction pieces appeared in the magazine, irregularly, over a period of forty-four years, among them reports from China, Russia, and Israel, and a five-part Profile of President Harry S. Truman. Hersey was never officially on this magazine's staff; when he wrote "Hiroshima" he was fresh from *Time*, and the deepest institutional affiliation of his life was with Yale, where he was educated, and which, in middle and old age, he served as master of Pierson College and as a notably talented and generous teacher of writing. Nevertheless, "Hiroshima" remains his crowning achievement. Though it is imbued with a profound moral sense, it does not preach. It does not hector. It simply tells. The power of it, and of its author, is in the reporting. ♦

SHOUTS AND MURMURS

GUILT TRIPS

BY JONATHAN WILSON

Last week, I went to the Whitney Biennial. I put on my (yellow) badge of shame that read "I CAN'T IMAGINE EVER WANTING TO BE WHITE," and then I was allowed into the exhibition. The show, as the button indicates, is largely about marginalized people. In the spirit of the show, I thought I would talk to the people hovering on the margins in the spacious galleries—that is, the museum guards.

The first guard I approached was wearing his "THE WHITNEY MUSEUM" badge upside down. He was in his sixties, stoop-shouldered, gray-haired. I asked him what he thought of the work on display, and he replied, "I like to draw—realistically. Some of these are all right. Some of them can draw." Then I spoke to a female guard with a beautiful Nefertiti flattop. She said, "You can't fault the museum. It's their responsibility to show the public what's out there. But it's up to you to decide whether you can swing with it or not." All the guards I spoke to were happy to have an opportunity to comment on the sculptures, paintings, and installations that they must look at for hours and hours every day.

In front of "European (Historic) Competition Wheel," by Francesc Torres, it was my turn to be asked a question by a stranger: "Is that Karl Marx?" This from a curly-haired man in a shiny pin-striped suit. He was referring to a portrait set in hubcap position on a small Goodyear tire. I had been standing near the sculpture for a few minutes and listening to visitors argue among themselves over what the work was about. Then the man in the suit had said, "May I speak?"

They replied, "Go ahead."

"Artists," he began, "speak in languages that we don't yet understand." I thought suddenly, and irresistibly, of "Star Trek." He was going to continue when he decided to check in with me about Karl Marx. I said that I thought it was Karl Marx, but I wasn't sure—it might be Walt Whitman. My tentative affirmation was good enough. He went on, "Karl Marx was the guy who invented Communism. The irony—the joke—is that Goodyear is an American company. Goodyear is about selling you one thing. Karl Marx is about selling you something else."

At "Those Fluttering Objects of Desire," by Shu Lea Cheang, I watched a woman watch heaving hairy buttocks on a video screen. She kept saying to her friend, "What is this? What is this?" Her friend indicated that she should put a quarter in a phone next to the screen and pick up the red receiver. The woman did so, listened for a few minutes, and then said, "What *is* this?"

The "in your face" works—representations of grotesque sexuality, dismemberment, evisceration, multiple acts of violence—were supposed to make the viewer think hard about the white man's privilege and the disasters it has wrought for everyone else. But although I knew I was expected to feel guilty, I didn't. Why not? Somewhere around the third floor, I started to think that perhaps it was beyond the ability of art to induce guilt.

I CAN'T
IMAGINE
EVER WANTING
TO BE
HERE

Part of the reason for my guiltlessness can be ascribed to the ubiquitous presence of video in the exhibition. The endless loops, it seems to me, deny rather than encourage access to reality. For example, the more I watched the Rodney King video, prominently displayed by the Whitney, the less it meant to me. I would call this the "Challenger" phenomenon. Like the repeated TV showings of the shuttle explosion, which by the end of the day it occurred had successfully inoculated American viewers against the horror, the non-stop footage of the Rodney King beating gets in between its viewers and reality. The video, which looks as if it were bringing bad news, actually masks it: an obscene beating is metamorphosed into so many dots of smell-free, blood-free electronic information. The unspeakable becomes commonplace—abomination without tears. The result, as with many of the Biennial's politically motivated inclusions, is to encourage cheap voyeurism rather than a revolution in viewer consciousness.

Back outside, within two blocks of the museum on Madison Avenue, I did feel guilty. Two men were powerfully drawing attention to themselves. One sat on the sidewalk with a placard in black letters that read "I WOULD DO *ANY* ODDJOB I HAVE TRIED EVERYTHING." The other, ragged and shivering, was wrapped in a multicolored blanket that appeared to be his home. ♦

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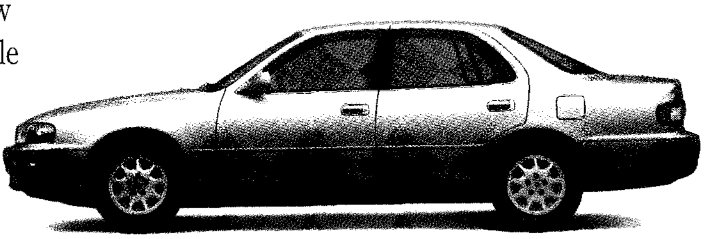

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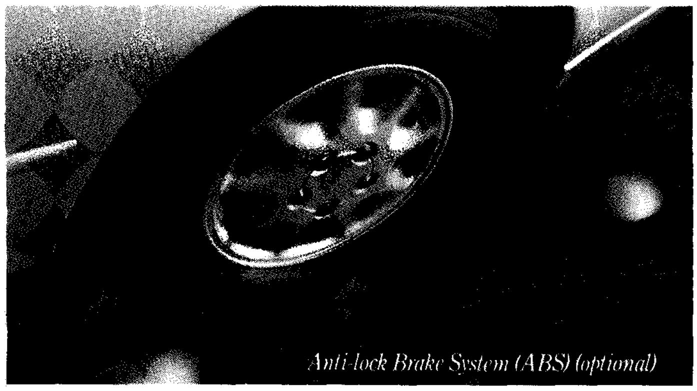

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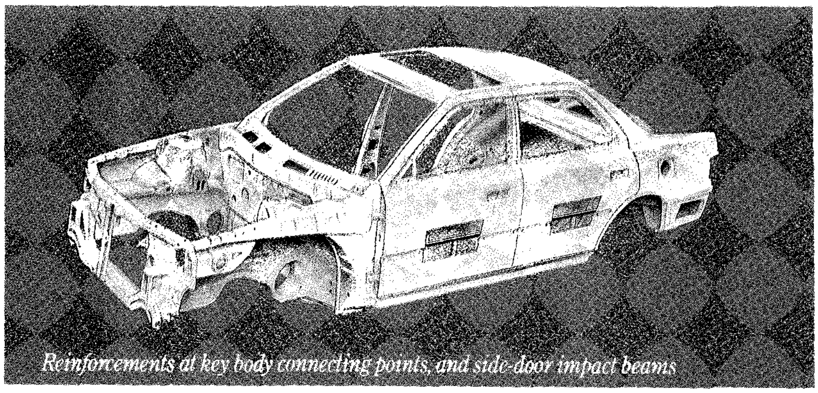
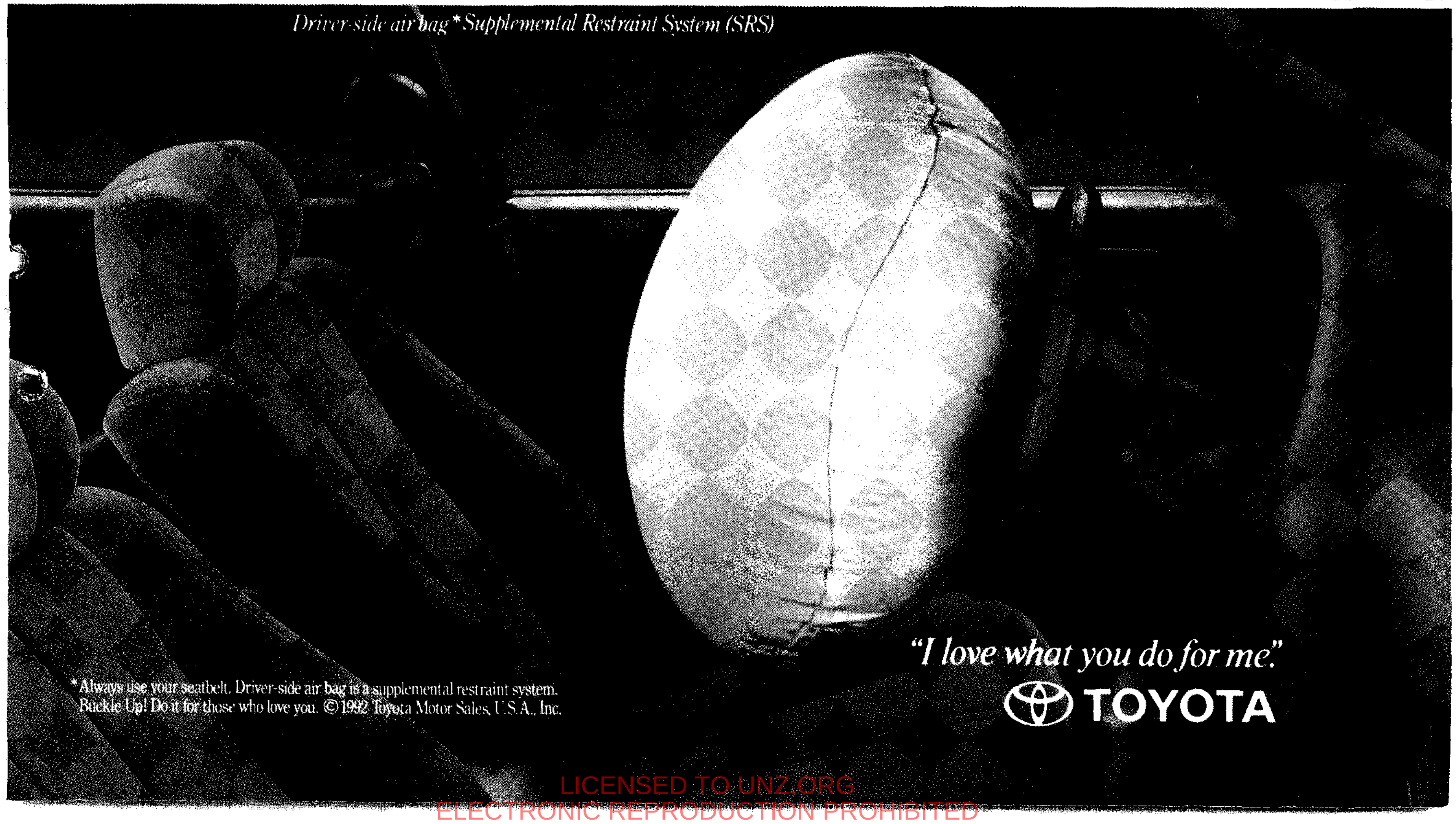


Reinforcements at key body connecting points, and side-door impact beams



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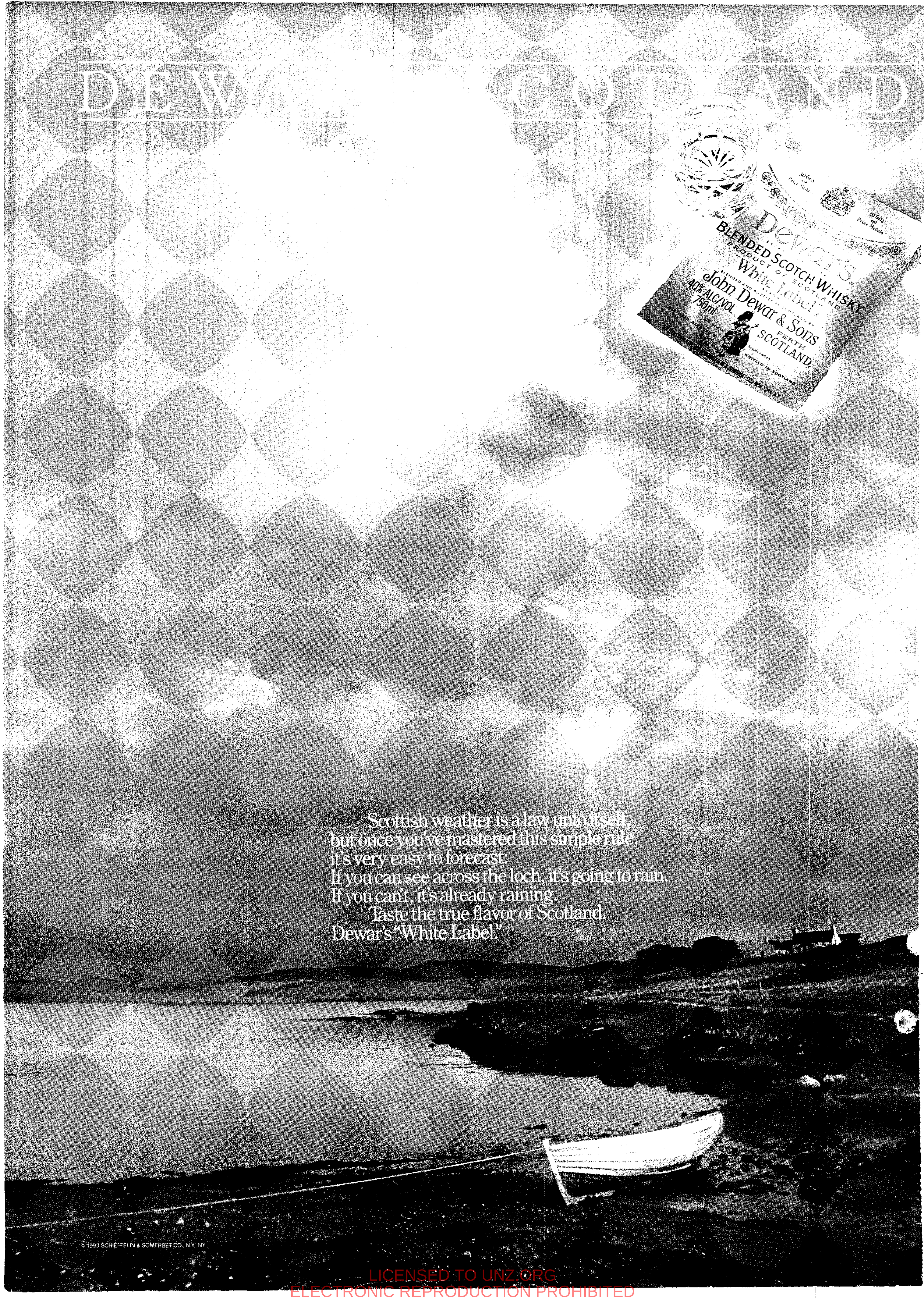

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